

SOMEHOW GOOD

WILLIAM DE MORGAN







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SOMEHOW GOOD





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# SOMEHOW GOOD

BY

WILLIAM DE MORGAN

*"Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill"*

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1908

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TO  
M. D. W.

FROM  
W. D. M.



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## CHAPTER I

AN exceptionally well-built man in a blue serge suit walked into a bank in the City, and, handing his card across the counter, asked if credit had been wired for him from New York. The clerk to whom he spoke would enquire.

As he leaned on the counter, waiting for the reply, his appearance was that of a man just off a sea voyage, wearing a suit of clothes well knocked about in a short time, but quite untainted by London dirt. His get-up conveyed no information about his social position or means. His garments had been made for him ; that was all that could be said. That is something to know. But it leaves the question open whether their wearer is really only a person in decent circumstances—*one* decent circumstance, at any rate—or a Duke.

The trustworthy young gentleman in spectacles who came back from an authority in the bush to tell him that no credit had been wired so far, did not seem to find any difficulty in affecting confidence that the ultimate advent of this wire was an intrinsic certainty, like the post. Scarcely, perhaps, the respectful confidence he would have shown to a real silk hat—for the applicant's was mere soft felt, though it looked new, for that matter—and a real clean shirt, one inclusive of its own collar and cuffs. Our friend's answered this description ; but then, it was blue. However, the confidence would have wavered under an independent collar and wristbands. Cohesiveness in such a garment means that its wearer may be an original genius ; compositeness may mean that he has to economise, like us.

"Did you expect it so early as this?" says the trustworthy young gentleman, smiling sweetly through his spectacles. "It isn't ten o'clock yet." But he only says this to show his confidence, don't you see? Because his remark is in its nature meaningless, as there is no time of day telegrams have a penchant for. No doubt there is a time—perhaps even times and half-a-



time—when you cannot send them. But there is no time when they may not arrive. Except the smallest hours of the morning, which are too small to count.

“ I don’t think I did,” replies the applicant. “ I don’t think I thought about it. I wired them yesterday from Liverpool, when I left the boat, say four o’clock.”

“ Ah, then of course it’s a little too early. It may not come till late in the afternoon. It depends on the load on the wires. Could you call in again—well, a little before our closing-time ?”

“ All right.” The speaker took out a little purse or pocket-book, and looked in it. “ I thought so,” said he ; “ that was my last card.” But the clerk had left it in the inner sanctum. He would get it, and disappeared to do so. When he came back with it, however, he found its owner had gone, saying never mind, it didn’t matter.

“ Chap seems in a great hurry !” said he to his neighbour clerk. “ What’s he got that great big ring on his thumb for ?” And the other replying : “ Don’t you know ’em—rheumatic rings ?” he added : “ Doesn’t look a rheumatic customer, anyhow !” And then both of them pinned up cheques, and made double entries.

The chap didn’t seem in a great hurry as he sauntered away along Cornhill, looking in at the shop windows. He gave the idea of a chap with a fine June day before him in London, with a plethora of choices of what to do and where to go. Also of being keenly interested in everything, like a chap that had not been in London for a long time. After watching the action of a noiseless new petroleum engine longer than its monotonous idea of life seemed to warrant, he told a hansom to take him to the Tower, for which service he paid a careless two shillings. The driver showed discipline, and concealed his emotions. *He* wasn’t going to let out that it was a double fare, and impair a fountain of wealth for other charioteers to come. Not he !

The fare enjoyed himself evidently at the Tower. He saw everything he could be admitted to—the Beauchamp Tower for sixpence, and the Jewel-house for sixpence. And he gave un-called-for gratuities. When he had thoroughly enjoyed all the dungeons and all the torture-relics, and all the memories of Harrison Ainsworth’s romance, read in youth and never forgotten, he told another hansom to drive him across the Tower Bridge, and not go too fast.

As he crossed the Bridge he looked at his watch. It was half-



past twelve. He would have time to get back before half-past one to a restaurant he had made a mental note of near the bank, and still to allow the cabby to drive on a bit through the transpontine and interesting regions of Rotherhithe and Cherry Garden Pier. It was so unlike anything he had been seeing lately. None the worse for the latter, in some respects. So, at least, thought the fare.

For he had the good, or ill, fortune to strike on a rich vein of so-called life in a London slum. Shrieks of fury, terror, pain were coming out of an archway that led, said an inscription, into Livermore's Rents, 1808. Public opinion, outside those Rents, ascribed them to the fact that Salter had been drinking. He was on to that pore wife of his again, like last week. Half killed her, he did, then! But he was a bad man to deal with, and public opinion wouldn't go down that court if I was you.

"But you're not, you see!" said the fare, who had sought this information. "You stop here, my lad, till I come back." This to the cabman, who sees him, not without misgivings about a source of income, plunge into the filthy and degraded throng that is filling the court, and elbow his way to the scene of excitement.

"*He's* all right!" said that cabby. "I'll put a tenner on him, any Sunday morning"—a figure of speech we cannot explain.

From his elevation above the crowd he can see a good deal of what goes on, and guess the rest. Of what he hears, no phrase could be written without blanks few readers could fill in, and for the meaning of which no equivalent can even be hinted. The actual substance of the occurrence, that filters through the cries of panic and of some woman or child, or both, in agony, the brutal bellowings and threats of a predominant drunken lout, presumably Mr. Salter, the incessant appeals to God and Christ by terrified women, and the rhetorical use of the names of both by the men, with the frequent suggestion that some one else should go for the police—this actual substance may be dryly stated thus: Mr. Salter, a plumber by trade, but at present out of work, had given way to ennui, and to relieve it had for two days past been beating and otherwise maltraeting his daughter, aged fourteen, and had threatened the life of her mother for endeavouring to protect her. At the moment when he comes into this story (as a mere passing event we shall soon forget without regret) he is engaged in the fulfilment of a previous promise to his unhappy wife—a promise we cannot transcribe

literally, because of the free employment of a popular adjective (supposed to be a corruption of "by Our Lady") before or after any part of speech whatever, as an expletive to drive home meaning to reluctant minds. It is an expression unwelcome on the drawing-room table. But, briefly, what Mr. Salter had so sworn to do was to twist his wife's nose off with his finger and thumb. And he did not seem unlikely to carry out his threat, as Livermore's tenantry lacked spirit or will to interpose, and did nothing but shriek in panic when feminine, and show discretion when masculine; mostly affecting indifference, and saying they warn't any good, them Salters. The result seemed likely to turn on whether the victim's back hair would endure the tension as a fulcrum, or would come rippin' out like so much grarse.

"Let go of her!" half bellows, half shrieks her legal possessor, in answer to a peremptory summons. "Not for a swiney, soap-eatin' Apoarstle—not for a rotten parson's egg, like you! Not for a . . ."

But the defiance is cut short by a blow like the kick of a horse, that lands fairly on the eye-socket with a cracking concussion that can be heard above the tumult, and is followed by a roar of delight from the male vermin, who see all the joys before them of battle unshared and dangerless—the joys bystanders feel in foemen worthy of each other's steel, and open to be made the subject of wagers.

The fare rejects all offers to hold his coat, but throws his felt hat to a boy to hold. Self-elected seconds make a kind of show of getting a clear space. No idea of assisting in the suppression of a dangerous drunken savage seems to suggest itself—nothing but what is called "seeing fair." This is, to wit, letting him loose on even terms on the only man who has had the courage to intervene between him and his victim. Let us charitably suppose that this is done in the hope that it means prompt and tremendous punishment before the arrival of the police. The cabman sees enough from his raised perch to justify his anticipating this with confidence. He can just distinguish in the crowd Mr. Salter's first rush for revenge and its consequences. "He's got it!" is his comment.

Then he hears the voice of his fare ring out clear in a lull—such a one as often comes in the tense excitement of a fight. "Give him a minute. . . . Now stick him up again!" and then is aware that Mr. Salter has been replaced on his legs, and is trying to get at his antagonist, and cannot. "He's playin'



with him !" is his comment this time. But he does not play with him long, for a swift *finale* comes to the performance, perhaps consequent on a cry that heralds a policeman. It causes a splendid excitement in that cabman, who gets as high as he can, to miss none of it. "That's your sort !" he shouts, quite wild with delight. "That's the style ! Foller on ! Foller on !" And then, subsiding into his seat with intense satisfaction, "Done his job, anyhow ! Hope he'll be out of bed in a week !" — the last with an insincere affectation of sympathy for the defeated combatant.

The fare comes quickly along the court and out at the entry, whose occupants the cabman flicks aside with his whip suggestively. "Let the gentleman come, can't you !" he shouts at them. They let him come. "Be off sharp !" he says to the cabby, who replies, "Right you are, governor !" and is off, sharp. Only just in time to avoid three policemen, who dive into Livermore's Rents, and possibly convey Mr. Salter to the nearest hospital. Of all that this story knows no more ; Mr. Salter goes out of it.

The fare, who seems very little discomposed, speaks through the little trap to his Jehu. "I never got my new hat again," he says. "You must drive back ; there won't be any decent hatter here."

"Ask your pardon, sir—the Bridge is histed. Vessel coming through—string of vessels with a tug-boat."

"Oh, well, get back to the Bank—anywhere—the nearest way you can." And after a mysterious short cut through narrow ways that recall old London, some still paved with cobbles, past lofty wharves or warehouses daring men lean from the floors of at dizzy heights, and capture bales for, that seem afloat in the atmosphere till one detects the thread that holds them to their crane above—under unexplained rialtos and over inexplicable iron incidents in paving that ring suddenly and waggle underfoot—the cab finds its way across London Bridge, and back to a region where you can buy anything, from penny puzzles to shares in the power of Niagara, if you can pay for them.

Our cab-fare, when he called out, "Hold hard here !" opposite to a promising hat-shop, seemed to be in doubt of being able to pay for something very much cheaper than Niagara. He took out his purse, still sitting in the cab, and found in it only a sovereign, apparently. He felt in his pockets. Nothing there, beyond five shillings and some coppers. He could manage well

enough—so his face and a slight nod seemed to say—till he went back to the Bank after lunch. And so, no doubt, he would have done had he been content with a common human billycock or bowler, like the former one, at four-and-six. But man is born to give way to temptation in shops. No doubt you have noticed the curious fact that when you go into a shop you always spend more—more than you mean to, more than you want to, more than you've got—one or other of them—but always *more*.

Inside the shop, billycocks in tissue-paper came out of hand-boxes, and then out of tissue-paper. But, short of eight shillings, they betrayed a plebeian nature, and lacked charm. Now, those beautiful white real panamas, at twenty-two shillings, were exactly the thing for this hot weather, especially the one the fare tried on. His rich brown hair, that wanted cutting, told well against the warm straw-white. He looked handsome in it, with those strong cheek-bones and bronzed throat Mr. Salter would have been so glad to get at. He paid for it, saying never mind the receipt, and then went out to pay the cabby, who respectfully hoped he didn't see him any the worse for that little affair over the water.

"None the worse, thank you! Shan't be sorry for lunch, though." Then, as he stands with three shillings in his hand, waiting for a recipient hand to come down from above, he adds: "A very one-sided affair! Did you hear what he said about his daughter? That was why I finished him so thoroughly."

"No, sir, I did *not* hear it. But he was good for the gruel he's got, Lord bless you! without that. . . . I ask your pardon, sir—no! *Not* from a gentleman like you! Couldn't think of it! Couldn't *think* of it!" And with a sudden whip-lash, and a curt hint to his horse, that cabman drove off unpaid. The other took out a pencil, and wrote the number of the cab on his blue wrist-band, close to a little red spot—Mr. Salter's blood, probably. When he had done this he turned towards the restaurant he had taken note of. But he seemed embarrassed about finances—at least, about the three shillings the cabby had refused; for he kept them in his hand as if he didn't know what to do with them. He walked on until he came to a hidden haven of silence some plane-trees and a church were enjoying unmolested, and noticing there a box with a slot, and the word "Contributions" on it, dropped the three shillings in without more ado, and passed on. But he had no intention of lunching on the small sum he had left.

An inquiry of a City policeman guided him to a pawnbroker's



shop. What would the pawnbroker lend him on that—his watch? Fifteen shillings would do quite well. That was his reply to an offer to advance that sum, if he was going to leave the chain as well. It was worth more, but it would be all safe till he came for it, at any rate. “You’ll find it here, any time up to twelve months,” said the pawnbroker, who also nodded after him knowingly as he left the shop. “Coming back for it in a week, of course! All of ’em are. Name of Smith, *as usual!* Most of ’em are.” Yet this man’s honouring Mr. Smith with a comment looked as if he thought him unlike “most of ’em.” *He* never indulged in reflections on the ruck—be sure of that!

Mr. Smith, if that was his name, didn’t seem uneasy. He found his way to his restaurant and ordered a very good lunch and a bottle of Perrier-Jouet—not a half-bottle; he certainly was extravagant. He took his time over both, also a nap; then, waking, felt for his watch and remembered he had pawned it; looked at the clock and stretched himself, and called for his bill and paid it. Most likely the wire had come to the Bank by now; anyhow, there was no harm in walking round to see. If it wasn’t there he would go back to the hotel at Kensington where he had left his luggage, and come back to-morrow. It was a bore. Perhaps they would let him have a cheque-book, and save his having to come again. Much of this is surmise, but a good deal was the substance of remarks made in fragments of soliloquy. Their maker gave the waiter sixpence and left the restaurant with three shillings in his pocket, lighting a cigar as he walked out into the street.

He kept to the narrow ways and little courts, wondering at the odd corners Time seems to have forgotten about, and Change to have deserted as unworthy of her notice; every door of every house an extract from a commercial directory, mixed and made unalphabetical by the extractor; every square foot of flooring wanted for Negotiation to stand upon, and Transactions to be carried out over. No room here for anything else, thought the smoker, as, after a quarter of an hour’s saunter, he threw away the end of his cigar. But his conclusion was premature. For lo and behold!—there, in a strange little wedge-shaped corner, of all things in the world, *a barber’s shop*; maybe a relic of the days of Ben Jonson or earlier—how could a mere loafer tell? Anyhow, his hair wanted cutting sufficiently to give him an excuse to see the old place inside. He went in and had his hair cut—but under special reservation; not too much! The hair-



dresser was compliant ; but, said he, regretfully : “ You do your ’ed, sir, less than justice.” Its owner took his residuum of change from his pocket, and carelessly spent all but a few coppers on professional remuneration and a large bottle of eau-de-Cologne. Perhaps the reflection that he could cab all the way back to the hotel had something to do with this easy-going way of courting an empty pocket.

When he got to the Bank another young gentleman, with no spectacles this time, said *he* didn’t know if any credit was wired. He was very preoccupied, pinning up cheques and initialling some important customer’s paying-in book. But *he* would enquire in a moment, if you would wait. And did so, with no result ; merely expression of abstract certainty that it was sure to come. There was still an hour—over an hour—before closing-time, said he to a bag with five pounds of silver in it, unsympathetically. If you could make it convenient to look in in an hour, probably we should have received it. The person addressed but not looked at might do so—wouldn’t commit himself—and went away.

The question seemed to be how to while away that hour. Well !—there was the Twopenny Tube. At that time it was new, and an excitement. Our friend had exactly fourpence in his pocket. That would take him to anywhere and back before the Bank closed. And also he could put some of that eau-de-Cologne on his face and hands. He had on him still a sense of the foulness of Livermore’s Rents, and wanted something to counteract it. Eau-de-Cologne is a great sweetener.

## CHAPTER II

HE took his fare in the Twopenny Tube. It was the last twopence but one that he had in his pocket. Something fascinated him in the idea of commanding, in exchange for that twopence, the power of alighting at any point between Cheapside and Shepherd's Bush. Which should it be ?

If he could only make up his mind to *not* alighting at Chancery Lane, he would have two whole minutes for consideration. If British Museum, he would have four. If Tottenham Court Road, six—and so on. For the time being he was a sort of monarch, in a small way, over Time and Space. He would go on to the Museum, at any rate.

What little things life hangs on, sometimes ! If he had foolishly got out at either Chancery Lane or British Museum, there either would have been no reason for writing this story ; or, if written, it would have been quite different. For at the Museum Station a girl got into the carriage ; and, passing him on her way to a central haven of rest trod on his foot, with severity. It hurt, so palpably, that the girl begged his pardon. She was a nice girl, and sorry.

He forgave her because she was a nice girl, with beautiful rows of teeth and merry eyebrows. He might have forgiven her if she had been a dowdy. But he liked forgiving those teeth, and those eyebrows.

So when she sat down in the haven, close to his left shoulder, he wasn't sorry that his remark that *he* ought to beg *her* pardon, because it was all his fault for sticking out, overlapped her coming to an anchor. If it had been got through quicker, the incident would have been regarded as closed. As it was, the fag-end of it was unexhausted, and she didn't quite catch the whole. It was in no way unnatural that she should turn her head slightly, and say : " I beg your pardon." Absolute silence would have been almost

discourteous, after plunging on to what might have been a bad corn.

"I only meant it was my fault for jamming up the whole gangway."

"Oh yes—but it was my fault all the same—for—for——"

"Yes—I beg your pardon? You were going to say—for——?"

"Well—I mean—for standing on it so long, then! If you had called out—but indeed I didn't think it was a foot. I thought it was something in the electricity."

Two things were evident. One was that it was perfectly impossible to be stiff and stodgy over it, and not laugh out. The other, the obvious absurdity of imputing any sort of motive to the serene frankness and absolute candour of the speaker. Any sort of motive—"of *that* sort"—said he to himself, without further analysis. He threw himself into the laugh, without attempting any. It disposed of the discussion of the subject, but left matters so that stolid silence would have been priggish. It seemed to him that not to say another word would almost have amounted to an insinuation against the eyebrows and the teeth. He would say one—a most impersonal one.

"Do they stop at Bond Street?"

"Do you want to stop at Bond Street?"

"Not at all. I don't care where I stop. I think I meant—is there a station at Bond Street?"

"The station wasn't opened at first. But it's open now."

What an irritating thing a conversation can be! Here was this one, just as one of its constituents was beginning to wish it to go on, must needs exhaust its subject and confess that artificial nourishment was needed to sustain it. And she—for it was she, not he:—did you guess wrong?—had begun to want to know, don't you see, why the man with the hair on the back of his browned hand and the big plain gold ring on his thumb did not care where he stopped. If he had had a holiday look about him she might have concluded that he was seeing London, and then what could be more natural than to break loose, as it were, in the Twopenny Tube? But in spite of his leisurely look, he had not in the least the seeming of a holiday-maker. His clothes were not right for the part. What he was could not be guessed without a clue, and the conversation had collapsed, clearly! It was irritating to be gravelled for lack of matter—and he was such a perfect stranger! The girl was a



reader of Shakespeare, but she certainly didn't see her way to Rosalind's little expedient. "Even though my own name *is* Rosalind," said she to herself.

It was the readiness and completeness with which the man dropped the subject, and recoiled into himself, that gave the girl courage to make an attempt to satisfy her curiosity. When a man harks back, palpably, on some preoccupation, after exchanging a laugh and an impersonal word or two with a girl who does not know him, it is the best confirmation possible of his previous good faith in seeming more fatherlike than manlike. Rosalind could risk it, surely. "Very likely he has a daughter my age," said she to herself. Then she saw an opening—the thumb-ring.

"Do pray excuse me for asking, but do you find it does good? My mother was recommended to try one."

"This ring? It hasn't done *me* any good. But then, I have hardly anything the matter. I don't know about other people. I'm sorry I bought it, now. It cost four-and-sixpence, I think. I would sooner have the four-and-sixpence. . . . Yes, decidedly! I would sooner have the four-and-sixpence."

"Can't you sell it?"

"I don't believe I could get sixpence for it."

"Do please excuse me—I mean, excuse the liberty I take—but I should so much like to—to. . . ."

"To buy it for sixpence? Certainly. Why not? Much better than paying four-and-six for a new one. Your mother *may* find it do her good. I don't care about it, and I really have nothing the matter."

He drew the ring off his thumb, and Rosalind took it from him. She slipped it on her own finger, over her glove. Naturally it slipped off—a man's thumb-ring! She passed it up inside the glove-palm, through the little slot above the buttons. Then she got out her purse, and looked in to see what its resources were.

"I have only got half-a-crown," said she. The man flushed slightly. Rosalind fancied he was angry, and had supposed she was offering beyond her bargain, which might have implied liberality, or benevolence, or something equally offensive. But it wasn't that at all.

"I have no change," said he. "Never mind about the sixpence. Send me stamps. I'll give you my card." And then he recollected he had no card, and said so.

"It doesn't matter being very exact," said she.

"I have no money at all. Except twopence."

Rosalind hesitated. This man must be very hard up, only he certainly did not give that impression. Still, "no money at all, except twopence"! Would it be safe to try to get the half-crown into his pocket? That was what she wanted to do, but felt she might easily blunder over it. If she was to achieve it, she must be quick, for the public within hearing was already feeling in its pocket, in order to oblige with change for half-a-crown. She *was* quick.

"You send it *me* in stamps," she said, pressing the coin on him. "Take it, and I'll get my card for the address. It will be one-and-eleven exactly, because of the postage. It ought to be a penny for stationery, too.... Oh, well! never mind, then...."

She had got the card, and the man, demurring to the stationery suggestion, and, indeed, hesitating whether to take the coin at all, looked at the card with a little surprise on his face. He read it :

MRS. NIGHTINGALE.

MISS ROSALIND NIGHTINGALE.

KRAKATOA, GLENMOIRA ROAD,  
SHEPHERD'S BUSH, W.

"I'm not Mrs. Nightingale," said the girl. "That's my mother."

"Oh no!" said he. "It wasn't that. It was only that I knew the name once—years ago."

The link in the dialogue here was that she had thought the surprise was due to his crediting her with matrimony and a visiting-card daughter. She was just thinking could she legitimately inquire into the previous Nightingale, when he said some more of his own accord, and saved her the trouble.

"Rosalind Nightingale was the name," said he. "Do you know any relation——?"

"Only my mother," answered the girl, surprised. "She's

Rosalind, too, like me. I mean, *I'm* Rosalind. I am always called Sally, though."

The man was going to answer, when, as luck would have it, the card slipped from his fingers and fluttered down. In pursuing it he missed the half-crown, which the young lady released, fancying he was about to take hold of it, and stooped to search for it where it had rolled under the seat.

"How idiotic of me!" said he.

"Next station Uxbridge Road." Thus the guard proclaimed; and then, seeing the exploration that was going on after the half-crown, he added: "I should let it go at that, mister, if I was you."

The man asked why.

"There was a party tried that game last week. He's in the hospital now." This was portentous and enigmatical. The guard continued: "If a party gets electrocuted, it's no concern of the employees on the line. It lies between such parties and the Company. I shouldn't myself, if I was you! But it's between you and the Company. I wash *my* hands."

"If the wires are properly insulated"—this was from an important elderly gentleman, of a species invariable under the circumstances—"if the wires are properly insulated, there is not the slightest cause for apprehension of any sort or kind."

"Very good!" said the guard gloomily. "Then all I say is, insoolate 'em yourselves. Don't try to put it on me! Or else keep your hands well outside of the circuit." But the elderly gentleman was not ready to acquiesce in the conditions pointed at.

"I repeat," said he, "that the protection of the public is, or ought to be, amply secured by the terms of the company's charter. If any loophole exists for the escape of the electric current, all I can say is, the circumstances call for public enquiry. The safety of the public is the concern of the authorities."

"Then," said the guard pointedly, "if I was the public, I should put my hands in my pocket, and not go fishing about for ambiguous property in corners. There!—what did I tell you? Now you'll say that was me, I suppose?"

The thing that hadn't been the guard was a sudden crackle that leaped out in a blue flame under the seat where the man's hand was exploring for the half-crown. It was either that, or another like it, at the man's heel. Or both together. A little boy was intensely delighted, and wanted more of the same sort.



The elderly gentleman turned purple with indignation, and would at once complain to the authorities. They would take the matter up, he doubted not. It was a disgrace, etc., etc., etc.

Rosalind, or Sally, Nightingale showed no alarm. Her merry eyebrows were as merry as ever, and her smile was as unconscious a frame to her pearly teeth as ever, when she turned to the mother of the delighted little boy and spoke.

“There now ! It’s exactly like that when I comb my hair in very dry weather.” And the good woman was able to confirm this from her own experience, narrating (with needless details) the strange phenomena attendant on the head of a young person in quite a good situation at Woollamses, and really almost a lady, stating several times what she had said to the young person, Miss Ada Taylor, and what answer she had received. She treated the matter entirely with reference to the bearings of the electric current on questions of social status.

But the man did not move, remaining always with his arm under the seat. Rosalind, or Sally, thought he had run the half-crown home, but in some fixed corner from which detachment was for a moment difficult. Wondering why the moment should last so long, she spoke.

“Have you got it ?” said she.

But the man spoke never a word, and remained quite still.

### CHAPTER III

KRAKATOA was a semi-detached villa a few minutes' walk from Shepherd's Bush Station. It looked like a showily dressed wife of a shabby husband; for the semi-detached other villa next door had been standing to let for years, and its compo front was in a state of decomposition from past frosts, and its paint was parched and thin in the glare of the present June sun, and peeling and dripping spiritlessly from the closed shutters among the dead flies behind the cracked panes of glass that had quite forgotten the meaning of whitening and water, and that wouldn't hack out easy by reason of the putty having gone 'ard. One knew at a glance that if the turncock was to come, see, and overcome the reluctance of the allotted cock-to-be-turned, the water would burst out at every pore of the service-pipes in that house, except the taps; and would know also that the adept who came to soften their hearts and handles would have to go back for his tools, and would be a very long time away.

Krakatoa, on the other hand, was resplendent with stone-colour, and smelt strongly of it. And its door you could see through the glass of into the hall, when its shutters were not thumb-screwed up over the panes, was painted a green that staggered the reason, and smelt even more strongly than the stone-colour. And all the paint was so thick that the beadings on the door were dim memories, and all the execution on the sculptured goblets on pedestals flanking the steps in the front garden was as good as spoiled. And the paint simmered in the sun, and here and there it blistered and altogether suggested that Krakatoa, like St. Nicholas, might have halved its coats with the beggar next door—given him, suppose, one flat and one round coat. Also, that either the job had been 'urried, and not giv' proper time to dry, or that the summer had come too soon, and we should pay for it later on, you see if we didn't!

The coatless and woe-begone villa next door had almost lost

its name, so faded was the lettering on the gate-post that was putting out its bell-handle to the passer-by, even as the patient puts out his tongue to the doctor. But experts in palimpsests, if they had penetrated the superscriptions in chalk and pencil of idle authorship, would have found that it was *The Retreat*. Probably this would have been revealed even if the texts had been merely Bowdlerised with Indian-rubber or a sponge, because there were a good many objectionable passages.

But *The Retreat* was a retreat, and smelt strong of the Hermits, who were cats. Krakatoa was not a volcano, except so far as eruptions on the paint went. But then it had become Krakatoa through a mistake ; for the four coats of paint at the end of the first seven years, as per agreement, having completely hidden the first name, Saratoga, and the builders' retention of it having been feeble—possibly even affected by newspaper posters, for it was not long after the date of the great eruption—the new name had crept in in the absence of those who could have corrected it, but had gone to Brighton to get out of the smell of the paint.

When they returned, Mr. Prichard, the builder, though shocked and hurt at the discovery that the wrong name had been put up, was strongly opposed to any correction or alteration, especially as it would always show if altered back. You couldn't make a job of it ; not to say a proper job. Besides, the names were morally the same, and it was absurd to allow a variation in the letters to impose on our imagination. The two names had been applied to very different turns-out abroad, certainly ; but then they did all sorts of things abroad. If Saratoga, why not Krakatoa ? Mr. Prichard was entrenched in a stronghold of total ignorance of literary matters, and his position, that mere differences of words ought not to tell upon a healthy mind, was difficult to shake, especially as he had the coign of vantage. He had only to remain inanimate, and what could a (presumably) widow lady with one small daughter do against him ? So at the end of the first seven years, what had been Saratoga became Krakatoa, and remained so.

And it was in the back garden of the again newly painted villa, seven years later, that the lady of the house, who was watering the garden in the cool of the afternoon, asked her excited daughter, who had just come home in a cab, what on earth could have prompted her to do such a mad thing, such a perfectly *insane* thing ! We shall see what it was immediately.



“Oh, Sally, Sally!” exclaimed that young person’s still young and very handsome mother. “What *will* the child do next?”

“Oh, mamma, mamma!” answers Sally, just on the edge of a burst of tears; “what *was* I to do? What *could* I do? It was all my fault from the beginning. You *know* I couldn’t leave him to be taken to the police-station, or the hospital, or——”

“Yes, of course you could! Why not?”

“And not know what became of him, or anything? Oh, mother!”

“You silly child! Why on earth couldn’t you leave him to the railway people?”

“And run away and leave him alone? Oh, *mother!*”

“But you don’t even know his name.”

“Mamma dear, how *should* I know his name? Don’t you see, it was just like this.” And then Miss Sally Nightingale repeats, briefly and rapidly, for the second time, the circumstances of her interview in the railway-carriage and its tragic ending. Also their sequel on the railway-platform, with the partial recovery of the stunned or stupefied man, his inability to speak plainly, the unsuccessful search in his pockets for something to identify him, and the final decision to put him in a cab and take him to the workhouse infirmary, pending discovery of his identity. The end of her story has a note of relief in it:

“And it was then I saw Dr. Vereker on the platform.”

“Oh, you saw Dr. Vereker?”

“Of course I did, and he came with me. He’s always so kind, you know, and he knew the station people, so . . .”

“Where is he now?”

“Outside in the cab. He stopped to see after the man. We couldn’t both come away, so I came to tell you.”

“You stupid chit! why couldn’t you tell me at first? There, don’t cry and be a goose!”

But Sally disclaims all intention of crying. Her mother discards the watering-pot and an apron, and suppresses appearances of gardening; then goes quickly through the house, passes down the steps between the scarlet geraniums in the over-painted goblets, through the gate on which Saratoga ought to be, and Krakatoa is, written, and finds a four-wheeled cab awaiting developments. One of its occupants alights and meets her on

the pavement. A rapid colloquy ensues in undertones, ending in the slightly raised voice of the young man, who is clearly Dr. Vereker.

"Of course, you're perfectly right—perfectly right. But you'll have to make my peace with Miss Sally for me."

"A chit of a girl like that! Fancy a responsible man like you letting himself be twisted round the finger of a young monkey. But you men are all alike."

"Well, you know, really, what Miss Sally said was quite true—that it was only a step out of the way to call here. And she had got this idea that it was all her fault."

"Was it?"

"I can only go by what she says." The girl comes into the conversation through the gate. She may perhaps have stopped for a word or two with cook and a house-and-parlourmaid, who are deeply interested, in the rear.

"It *was* my fault," she said. "If it hadn't been for me, it would never have happened. Do see how he is now, Dr. Vereker."

It is open to surmise that, the first strong impulse of generosity having died down under the corrective of a mother, our young lady is gradually seeing her way to interposing Dr. Vereker as a buffer between herself and the subject of the conversation, for she does not go to the cab-door to look in at him. The doctor does. The mother holds as aloof as possible, not to get entangled into any obligations.

"Get him away to the infirmary, or the station at once," she says. "That's the best thing to be done. They'll take care of him till his friends come to claim him. Of course, they'll come. They always do." The doctor seems to share this confidence, or affects to do so.

"Sure to. His friends or his servants," says he. "But he can't give any account of himself yet. Of course, I don't know what he'll be able to do to-morrow morning."

He resumes his place in the cab beside its occupant, who, except for an entire want of animation, looks much like what he did in the railway-carriage—the same strong-looking man with well-marked cheek-bones, very thick brown hair and bushy brows, a skin rather tanned, and a scar on the bridge of the nose; very strong hands with a tattoo-mark showing on the wrist and an abnormal crop of hair on the back, running on to the fingers, but flawed by a scar or two. Add to this the chief thing you



would recollect him by, an Elizabethan beard, and you will have all the particulars about him that a navy-blue serge suit, with shirt to match, allows to be seen of him. But you will have an impression that could you see his skin beyond the sun-mark limit on his hands and neck, you would find it also tattooed. Yet you would not at once conclude he was a sailor ; rather, your conclusion might go on other lines, but always assigning to him a rough adventurous outdoor life.

When the doctor got into the cab and shut the door himself, he took too much for granted. He assumed the driver, without whom, if your horse has no ambition at all beyond tranquillity and an empty nosebag, your condition is that of one camping out ; or as one in a ship moored alongside in dock, the kerb-stone playing the part of the quay. Boys will then accumulate, and undervalue your appearance and belongings. And impossible persons, with no previous or subsequent existence, will endeavour to see their way to the establishment of a claim on you. And you will be rather grateful than otherwise that a policeman without active interests should accrue, and communicate to them the virus of dispersal, however long its incubation may be. You will then probably do as Dr. Vereker did, and resent the driver's disappearance. The boys, mysteriously in his, each others', and the policeman's confidence (all to your exclusion), will be able to quicken his movements, and he will come trooping from the horizon, on or beyond which is Somebody's Entire.

All this came to pass in due course, and the horse, deprived of his nosebag, returned to his professional obligations. But it was a shabby horse in a shabby cab, to which he imparted movement by falling forwards and saving himself just before he reached the ground. His reins were visibly made good with stout pack-thread, and he had a well-founded contempt for his whip, which seemed to come to an end too soon, and always to hit something wooden before it reached any sensitive part of his person. But he did get off at last, and showed that, as Force is a mode of motion, so Weakness is a mode of slowness, and one he took every advantage of.

The mother and daughter stood looking after the vanishing label, that stated that the complication of inefficiencies in front of it was one of twelve thousand and odd—pray Heaven, more competent ones !—in the Metropolis, and had nearly turned to go into the house, when the very much younger sister (that

might have been) addressed the very much, but not impossibly, older one thus :

“Mamma, he said he knew somebody of our name !”

“Well, Miss Fiddlestick !”—with an implication of what of that ? Were there not plenty of Nightingales in the world ? Miss Sally is perceptive about this.

“Yes, but he said Rosalind.”

“Where ?”

“He didn’t say where. That’s all he said—Rosalind.”

As the two stand together watching the retreating cab we are able to see that our first impression of them, derived perhaps from their relative ages only, was an entirely false one as far as size went. The daughter is nearly as tall as her mother, and may end by being as big a woman when she has completely graduated, taken her degree, in womanhood. But for all that we, who have looked at both faces, know that when they turn round we shall see on the shoulders of the one youth, inexperience, frankness, and expectation of things to come ; on those of the other a head that keeps all the mere physical freshness of the twenties, if not quite the bloom of the teens, but—expressed Heaven knows how !—experience, reserve, and retrospect on things that have been once and are not, and that we have no right to assume to be any concern of ours. Equally true of all faces of forty, do we understand you to say ? Well, we don’t know about that. It was all very strong in this face.

We can look again, when they turn round. But they don’t ; for number twelve thousand and odd has come to a standstill, and its energumenon has come down off its box, and is “fiddlin’ at something on the ’orse’s ’ed.” So cook says, evidently not impressed with that cab. The doctor looks out and confers ; then gets out and comes back towards the house. The girl and her mother walk to meet him.

“Never saw such a four-wheeler in my life ! The harness is tied up with string, and the rein’s broken. The idiot says if he had a stout bit of whipcord, he could make it square.” No sooner have the words passed the doctor’s lips than Miss Sally is off on a whipcord quest.

“I wish the child wouldn’t always be in such a hurry,” says her mother. “Now she won’t know where to get it.”

She calls after her ineffectually. The doctor suggests that he shall follow with instructions. Yes, suppose he does ? There is precisely the thing wanted in the left-hand drawer of the



table in the hall—the drawer the handle comes off. This seems unpromising, but the doctor goes, and transmission of messages ensues, heard within the house.

Left alone, Mrs. Nightingale, the elder Rosalind, seems reflective. “A funny thing, too!” she says aloud to herself. She is thinking, clearly, of how this man in the cab, who can’t give any account of himself, once knew a Rosalind Nightingale.

Probably the handle has come off the drawer, for they are a long time over that string. Curiosity has time to work, and has so much effect that the lady seems to determine that, after all, she would like to see the man. Now that the cab is so far from the door, even if she spoke to him, she would not stand committed to anything. It is all settled, arranged, ratified, that he shall go to the police-station, or the infirmary, “or somewhere.”

When the string, and Dr. Vereker, and Sally the daughter come out of the house, both exclaim. And the surprise they express is that the mother of the latter should have walked all the way after the cab, and should be talking to the man in it! It is not consistent with her previous attitude.

“Now, isn’t that like mamma?” says Sally. If so, why be so astonished at it?—is a question that suggests itself to her hearer. But self-confutation is not a disorder for his treatment. Besides, the doctor likes it, in this case. His own surprise at mamma’s conduct is unqualified by any intimate acquaintance with her character. She may be inconsistency itself, for anything he knows.

“Is she going to turn the cab round and bring him to the house, after all?” It looks like it.

“I’m so glad,” Sally replies to the doctor.

“I hope you won’t repent it in sackcloth and ashes.”

“I shan’t. Why do you think I shall?”

“How do you know you won’t?”

“You’ll see!” Sally pinches her red lips tight over her two rows of pearls, and nods confirmation. Her dark eyes look merry under the merry eyebrows, and the lip-pinch makes a dimple on her chin—a dimple to remember her by. She is a taking young lady, there is no doubt of it. At least, the doctor has none.

“Yes, Sally, it’s all quite right.” Thus her mother, arriving a little ahead of the returning cab. “Now, don’t dispute with me, child, but do just as I tell you. We’ll have him in the breakfast-room; there’s fewer steps.” She seems to have made

up her mind so completely that neither of the others interposes a word. But she replies, moved by a brain-wave, to a question that stirred in the doctor's mind.

"Oh yes; he has spoken. He spoke to me just now. I'll tell you presently. Now let's get him out. No, never mind calling cook. You take him on that side, doctor.... That's right!"

And then the man, whose name we still do not know, found himself half supported, half standing alone, on the pavement in front of a little white eligible residence, smelling of new paint. He did not the least know what had happened. He had only a vague impression that if some one or something, he couldn't say what, would only give up hindering him, he would find something he was looking for. But how could he find it if he didn't know what it was? And that he was quite in the dark about. The half-crown and the pretty girl who had given it to him, the train-guard and his cowardice about responsibility, the public-spirited gentleman, the railway-carriage itself, to say nothing of all the exciting experiences of the morning—all, all had vanished, leaving behind only the trace of the impulse to search. Nothing else! He stood looking bewildered, then spoke thickly.

"I am giving trouble," said he. Then the two ladies and the gentleman, whom he saw dimly and did not know, looked at one another, each perhaps to see if one of the others would speak first. In the end the lady who was a woman nodded to the gentleman to speak, and then the lady who was a girl confirmed her by what was little more than an intention to nod, not quite unmixed with a mischievous enjoyment at the devolution of the duty of speech on the gentleman. It twinkled in her closed lips. But the gentleman didn't seem overwhelmed with embarrassment. He spoke as if he was used to things.

"You have had an accident, sir.... On the railway.... In the Twopenny Tube.... Yes, you'll remember all about it presently.... Yes, I'm a doctor.... Yes, we want you to come in and sit down and rest till you're better.... No, it won't be a long job. *You'll* soon come round.... What? ... Oh no, no trouble at all! It's this lady's house, and she wants you to come in." The speaker seems to guess at the right meanings, as one guesses in the jaws of the telephone, perhaps with more confidence. But there was but little audible articulation on the other's part.



He seemed not to want much support—chiefly guidance. He was taken down the half-dozen steps that flanked a grass slope down to a stone paving, and through a door under the more numerous steps he had escaped climbing, and into a breakfast-room flush with the kitchen, opening on a small garden at the back. There was the marriage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert over the chimneypiece, and a tortoiseshell cat with a collar on the oilskin cover of a square table, who rose as though half resenting strange visitors; then, after stretching, decided on some haven less liable to disturbance, and went through the window to it without effort, emotion, or sound. There was a clock under a glass cover on the chimneypiece whose works you could see through, with a fascinating ratchet movement of perfect grace and punctuality. Also a vertical orange-yellow glass vase, twisted to a spiral, and full of spills. Also the leaning tower of Pisa, done small in alabaster. He could see all these things quite plainly, and but that his tongue seemed to have struck work, could have described them. But he could not make himself out, nor how and why he came to be there at all. Where ought he to have been, he asked himself? And, to his horror, he could not make that out either. Never mind. Patience was the word, clearly. Let him shut his eyes as he sat there, in the little breakfast-room, with the flies continually droning in the ceiling, and an especially large bluebottle busy in the window, who might just as easily have gone out and enjoyed the last hour of a long evening in a glorious sunshine, but who mysteriously preferred to beat himself for ever against a closed pane of glass, a self-constituted prisoner between it and a gauze blind—let him shut his eyes, and try to think out what it all meant, what it was all about.

All that he was perfectly certain of, at that moment, was that he was awake, with a contused pain all over, and a very stiff left hand and foot. And that, knowing he had been insensible, he was striving hard to remember what something was that had happened just before he became insensible. He had nearly got it, once or twice. Yes, now he *had* got it, surely! No, he hadn't. It was gone again.

A mind that is struggling to remember some particular thing does not deal with other possibilities of oblivion. We all know the painful phenomenon of being perfectly aware what it is we are trying to remember, feeling constantly close to it, but always failing to grasp it. We know what it will sound like when we



say it, what it will mean, where it was on the page we read it on. Oh dear yes!—quite plainly. The only thing we can't remember for the life of us is—what it *was*!

And while we are making stupendous efforts to recapture some such thing, does it ever occur to any of us to ask if we may not be mistaken in our tacit assumption that we are quite certain to remember everything else as soon as we try? That, in fact, it may be our memory-faculty itself that is in fault; and that we are only failing to recall one thing because at the moment it is that one sole thing, and no other, that we are trying our brains against.

It was so in the pause of a few minutes in which this man we write of, left to himself and the ticking of the clock, and hearing, through the activity of the bluebottle and the monotony of the ceiling flies, the murmur of a distant conversation between his late companions, who for the moment had left him alone, tried in vain to recover his particular thread of memory, without any uneasiness about the innumerable skeins that made up the tissue of his record of a lifetime.

When the young doctor returned, he found him still seated where he had left him, one hand over his eyes, the other on his knee. As he sat—for the doctor watched him from the door for a moment—he moved and replaced either hand at intervals, with implied distress in the movements. They gave the impression of constant attempt constantly baffled. The doctor, a shrewd-seeming young man with an attentive pale eye, and very fair hair, seemed to understand.

“Let me recommend you to be quiet and rest. Be quite quiet. You will be all right when you have slept on it. Mrs. Nightingale—that's the lady you saw just now; this is her house—will see that you are properly taken care of.”

Then the man tried to speak; it was with an effort.

“I wish to thank—I must thank——”

“Never mind thanks yet. All in good time. Now, what do you think you can take—to eat or drink?”

“Nothing—nothing to eat or drink.”

“Well, you know best. However, there's tea coming; perhaps you'll go so far as a cup of tea? You would be the better for it.”

Rosalind junior, or Sally, slept in the back bedroom on the first-floor—that is to say, if we ignore the basement floor and

call the one flush with the street-door step the ground-floor. We believe we are right in doing so. Rosalind senior, the mother, slept in the front one. It wasn't too late for tea, they had decided, and thereupon they had gone upstairs to revise and correct.

After a certain amount of slopping and splashing in the back room, uncorroborated by any in the front, Sally called out to her mother, on the disjointed lines of talk in real life :

"I like this soap ! Have you a safety-pin ?" Where to her mother replied, speaking rather drowsily and perfunctorily :

"Yes, but you must come and get it."

"It's so nice and oily. It's not from Cattley's ?"

"Yes, it is."

"I thought it was. Where's the pin ?" At this point she came into her mother's room, covering her slightly *retroussé* nose with her fresh-washed hands, to enjoy the aroma of Cattley's soap.

"In the little pink saucer. Only don't mess my things about."

"Headache, mammy dear ?" For her mother was lying back on the bed, with her eyes closed. The speaker left her hands over her nostrils as she spoke, to do full justice to the soap, pausing an instant in her safety-pin raid for the answer :

"I've been feeling the heat. It's nothing. You go down, and I'll come."

"Have some eau-de-Cologne ?" But, alas ! there was no eau-de-Cologne.

"Never mind. You go down, and I'll follow. I shall be all right after a cup of tea." And Sally, after an intricate movement with a safety-pin, an openwork lace cuff that has lost a button, and a white wrist, goes down three *accelerandos* of stair-lengths, with landing pauses, and ends with a dining-room door staccato. But she isn't long gone, for in two minutes the door reopens, and she comes upstairs as fast, nearly, as she went down. In her hand she carries, visibly, Johann Maria Farina.

"Where on earth did you find that ?" says her mother.

"The man had it. Wasn't it funny ? He heard me say to Dr. Vereker that I was so sorry I'd not been able to eau-de-Cologne your forehead, and he began speaking and couldn't get his words. Then he got this out of his pocket. I remember one of the men at the station said something about his having a

bottle, but I thought he meant a pocket-flask. He looks the sort of man that would have a pocket-flask and earrings."

Her mother doesn't seem to find this inexplicable, nor to need comment. Rather the contrary. Sally dabs her brow with eau-de-Cologne, beneficially, for she seems better, and says now go ; she won't be above a couple of minutes. Nor is she, in the sense in which her statement has been accepted, for she comes downstairs within seven by the clock with the dutiful ratchet movement.

When she came within hearing of those in the room below, she heard a male voice that was not Dr. Vereker's. Yes, the man (whom we still cannot speak of by a name) was saying something—slowly, perhaps—but fairly articulately and intelligibly. She went very deliberately, and listened in the doorway. She looked very pale, and very interested—a face of fixed attention, of absorption in something she was irresolute about, rather than of doubt about what she heard ; an expression rather out of proportion to the concurrent facts, as we know them.

"What is so strange"—this is what the man was saying, in his slow way—"is that I could find words to tell you, if I could remember what it is I have to tell. But when I try to bring it back, my head fails. Tell me again, mademoiselle, about the railway-carriage." Sally wondered why she was mademoiselle, but recognised a tone of deference in his use of the word. She did as he asked her, slightly interrupting her narrative to make sure of getting the tea made right as she did so.

"I trod on your foot, you know. (One, two, three spoonfuls.) Surely you must remember that ? (Four, and a little one for the pot.)"

"I have completely forgotten it."

"Then I was sorry, and said I would have come off sooner if I had known it was a foot. You *must* remember that ?" The man half smiled as he shook a slow-disclaiming head—one that would have remembered so gladly, if it could. "Then," continues Sally, "I saw your thumb-ring for rheumatism."

"My thumb-ring !" He presses his fingers over his closed eyes, as though to give Memory a better chance by shutting off the visible present, then withdraws them. "No, I remember no ring at all."

"How extraordinary !"



"I remember a violent concussion *somewhere*—I can't say where—and then finding myself in a cab, trying to speak to a lady whose face seemed familiar to me, but who she could be I had not the slightest idea. Then I tried to get out of the cab, and found I could not move—or hardly."

"Look at mamma again! Here she is, come." For Mrs. Nightingale has come into the room, looking white. "Yes, mother dear, I have. Quite full up to the brim. Only it isn't ready to pour yet." This last concerns the tea.

Mrs. Nightingale moves round behind the tea-maker, and comes full-face in front of her guest. One might have fancied that the hand that held the pocket-handkerchief that caused the smell of eau-de-Cologne that came in with her was tremulous. But then that very eau-de-Cologne was eloquent about the recent effect of the heat. Of course, she was a little upset. Nothing strikes either the doctor or Mademoiselle Sally as abnormal or extraordinary. The latter resumes:

"Surely, sir! Oh, you must, you *must* remember about the name Nightingale?"

"This young gentleman said it just now. *Your* name, madame?"

"Certainly, my name," says the lady addressed. But Sally distinguishes:

"Yes, but I didn't mean that. I meant when I took the ring from you, and was to pay for it. Sixpence. And you had no change for half-a-crown. And then I gave you my mother's card to send it to us here. One-and-elevenpence, because of the postage. Why, surely you can remember that!" She cannot bring herself to believe him. Dr. Vereker does, though, and tells him not to try recollecting; he will only put himself back. "Take the tea and wait a bit," is the doctor's advice. For Miss Sally is transmitting a cup of tea with studied equilibrium. He receives it absently, leaving it on the table.

"I do not know if you will know what I mean," he says, "but I have a sort of feeling of—of being frightened; for I have been trying to remember things, and I find I can remember almost nothing. Perhaps I should say I cannot remember *at all*—can't do any recollecting, if you understand." Every one can understand—at least, each says so. Sally goes on, half *sotto voce*: "You can recollect your own name, I suppose?" She speaks half-way between soliloquy and dialogue. The doctor throws in counsel, aside, for precaution.



"You'll only make matters worse, like that. Better leave him quite alone."

But the man's hearing doesn't seem to have suffered, for he catches the remark about his name.

"I can't tell," he says. "I am not so sure. Of course, I can't have forgotten my own name, because that's impossible. I will tell it you in a minute. . . . Oh dear ! . . ."

The young doctor seemed to disapprove highly of these efforts, and to wish to change the conversation. "Let it alone now," said he. "Only for a little. Would you kindly allow me to see your arm again ?"

"Let him drink his tea first." This is from Miss Sally, the tea-priestess. "Another cup ?" But no ; he won't take another cup, thanks.

"Now let's have the coat off, and get another look at the arm ; never mind apologising." But the patient had not contemplated apology. It was the stiffness made him slow. However, he got his coat off, and drew the blue shirt off his left arm. He had a fine hand and arm, but the hand hung inanimate, and the fingers looked scorched. Dr. Vereker began feeling the arm at intervals all the way up, and asking each time questions about the degree of sensibility.

"I couldn't say whether it's normal or not up there." So the patient testified. And Mrs. Nightingale, who was watching the examination intently, suggested trying the other arm in the same place for comparison.

"You didn't see the other arm at the station, doctor ?" she said.

"Didn't I ?"

"I was asking."

"Well, no. Now I come to think of it, I don't think I did. We'll have a look now, anyhow."

"*You're a nice doctor !*" This is from Miss Sally ; a little confidential fling at the profession. She is no respecter of persons. Her mother would, no doubt, check her—a pert little monkey !—only she is absorbed in the examination.

The doctor, as he ran back the right-arm sleeve, uttered an exclamation. "Why, my dear sir," cried he, "here we have it ! What more can we want ?"—and pointed at the arm. And Sally said, as though relieved : "He's got his name written on him plain enough, anyhow !" Her mother gave a sigh of relief, or something like it, and said, "Yes." The patient him-

self seemed quite as much perplexed as pleased at the discovery, saying only, in a subdued way : " It *must* be my name." But he did not seem to accept at all readily the name tattooed on his arm : " A. Fenwick, 1878."

" Whose name can it be if it is not yours ?" said Mrs. Nightingale. She fixed her eyes on his face, as though to watch his effort of memory. " Try and think." But the doctor protested.

" Don't do anything of the sort," said he. " It's very bad for him, Mrs. Nightingale. He *mustn't* think. Just let him rest."

The patient, however, could not resign himself without a struggle to this state of anonymous ambiguity. His bewilderment was painful to witness. " If it were my name," he said, speaking slowly and not very clearly, " surely it would bring back the first name. I try to recall the word, and the effort is painful, and doesn't succeed." His hostess seemed much interested, even to the extent of ignoring the doctor's injunctions.

" Very curious ! If you heard the name now, would you recollect it ?"

" I *wish* you wouldn't try these experiments," says the doctor. " They won't do him *any* good. *Rest's* the thing."

" I think I would rather try," says Fenwick, as we may now call him. " I will be quiet if I can get this right."

Mrs. Nightingale begins repeating names that begin with A. " Alfred, Augustus, Arthur, Andrew, Algernon——"

Fenwick's face brightens. " That's it !" says he. " Algernon. I knew it quite well all the time, of course. But I couldn't—couldn't. . . . However, I don't feel that I shall make myself understood."

" I can't make out," says Sally, " how you came to remember the bottle of eau-de-Cologne."

" I did not remember it. I do not now. I mean, how it came to be in the pocket. I can remember nothing else that was there—would have been, that is. There *is* nothing else there now, except my cigar-case and a pocket-book with nothing much in it. I can tell nothing about my watch. A watch ought to be there."

" There, there !" says the doctor ; " you will remember it all presently. Do take my advice and be quiet, and sit still and don't talk."

But half an hour or more after, although he had taken this advice, Fenwick remembered nothing, or professed to have remembered nothing. He seemed, however, much more collected, and, except on the memory-point, nearly normal.

When the doctor, looking at his watch, referred to his obligation to keep another engagement, Fenwick rose, saying that he was now perfectly well able to walk, and he would intrude no longer on his hostesses' hospitality. This would have been perfectly reasonable, but for one thing. It had come out that his pockets were empty, and he was evidently quite without any definite plan as to what he should do next, or where he should go. He was only anxious to relieve his new friends of an encumbrance. He was evidently the sort of person on whom the character sat ill; one who would always be most at ease when shifting for himself; such a one as would reply to any doubt thrown on his power of doing so, that he had been in many a worse plight than this before. Yet you would hardly have classed him on that account as an adventurer, because that term implies unscrupulousness in the way one shifts for oneself. His face was a perfectly honourable one. It was a face whose strength did not interfere with its refinement, and there was a pleasant candour in the smile that covered it as he finally made ready to depart with the doctor. He should never, he said, know how to be grateful enough to madame and her daughter for their kindness to him. But when pressed on the point of where he intended to go, and how they should hear what had become of him, he answered vaguely. He was undecided, but, of course, he would write and tell them, as they so kindly wished to hear of him. Would mademoiselle give him the address, written down?

They found themselves—at least, the doctor and Sally did—inferring, from his refreshed manner and his confidence about departing, that his memory was coming back, or would come back. It might have seemed needless inquisitiveness to press him with further questions. They left the point alone. After all, they had no more right to catechise him about himself than if he had been knocked down by a cart outside the door, and brought into the house unconscious—a thing which might quite well have happened.

Mrs. Nightingale seemed very anxious he should not go away quite unprovided with money. She asked Dr. Vereker to pass him on a loan from her before he parted with him. He could



post it back when it was quite convenient, so the doctor was to tell him. The doctor asked, Wasn't a sovereign a large order? But she seemed to think not. "Besides," said she, "it makes it certain we shall not lose sight of him. I'm not sure we ought to let him go at all," added she. She seemed very uneasy about it—almost exaggeratedly so, the doctor thought. But he was reassuring and confident, and she allowed his judgment to overrule hers. But he must bring him back without scruple if he saw reason to do so. He promised, and the two departed together, the gait and manner of Fenwick giving rise to no immediate apprehension.

"How rum!" said Sally, when they had gone. "I never thought I should live to see a man electrocuted."

"A man what?"

"Well, half-electrocuted, then. I say, mother——"

"What, dear?" She is looking very tired, and speaks absently. Sally makes the heat responsible again in her mind, and continues:

"I don't believe his name's Algernon at all! It's Arthur, or Andrew, or something of that sort."

"You're very wise, poppet. Why?"

"Because you stopped such a long time after Algernon. It was like cheating at Spiritualism. You *must* say the alphabet quite steady—A—B—C—D——" Sally sketches out the proper attitude for the impartial enquirer. "Or else you're an accomplice."

"You're a puss! No, *his* name's Algernon, right enough. . . . I mean, I've no doubt it's Algernon. Why shouldn't it be?"

"No reason at all. Dr. Vereker's is Conrad, so, of course, there's no reason why his shouldn't be Algernon." Satisfactory and convincing! At least, the speaker thinks so, and is perfectly satisfied. Her mother doesn't quarrel with the decision.

"Kitten!" she says suddenly. And then in reply to her daughter's, "What's up, mammy dear?" she suggests that they shall walk out in front—it is a quiet, retired sort of cul-de-sac road, ending in a fence done over with tar, with nails along the top like the letter *L* upside down—in the cool. "It's quite delicious now the sun's gone down, and Martha can make supper another half-hour late." Agreed.

The mother pauses as they reach the gate. "Who's that talking?" she asks, and listens.



"Nobody. It's only the sparrows going to bed."

"No, no; not that! Shish! be quiet! I'm sure I heard Dr. Vereker's voice——"

"How could you? He's home by now."

"Do be quiet, child!" She continues listening.

"Why not look round the corner and see if it isn't him?"

"Well, I was going to; only you and the sparrows make such a chattering. . . . There, I knew it would be that! Why doesn't he bring him back here, at once?" For at the end of the short road are Dr. Vereker and Fenwick, the latter with his hand on the top of a post, as though resting. They must have been there some minutes.

"Fancy their having got no further than the fire-alarm!" says Sally, who takes account of her surroundings.

"Of course, I ought never to have let him go." Thus her mother, with decision in her voice. "Come on, child!"

She seems greatly relieved at the matter having settled itself—so Sally thinks, at least.

"We got as far as this," Dr. Vereker says—rather meaninglessly, if you come to think of it. It is so very obvious.

"And now," says Mrs. Nightingale, "how is he to be got back again? That's the question!" She seems not to have the smallest doubt about the question, but much about the answer. It is answered, however, with the assistance of the previous police-constable, who reappears like a ghost. And Mr. Fenwick is back again within the little white villa, much embarrassed at the trouble he is giving, but unable to indicate any other course. Clearly, it would never do to accept the only one he can suggest—that he should be left to himself, leaning on the fire-alarm, till the full use of his limbs should come back to him.

Mrs. Nightingale, who is the person principally involved, seems quite content with the arrangement. The doctor, in his own mind, is rather puzzled at her ready acquiescence; but then, the only suggestion he could make would be that he should do precisely the same good office himself to this victim of an electric current of a good deal too many volts—too many for private consumption—or cab him off to the police-station or the workhouse. For Mr. Fenwick continues quite unable to give any account of his past or his belongings, and can only look forward to recollecting himself, as it were, to-morrow morning.

## CHAPTER IV

WE must suppose that the personal impression produced by the man so strangely thrown on the hands of Mrs. Nightingale and her daughter was a pleasant one. For had the reverse been the case, the resources of civilisation for disposing of him elsewhere had not been exhausted when the decision was come to that he should remain where he was ; till next morning, at any rate. The lady of the house—of course the principal factor in the solution of the problem—appeared, as we have seen, to have made up her mind on the subject. And probably her daughter had been enough influenced by the stranger's manner and appearance, even in the short period of the interview we have just described, to get rid of a feeling she had of self-reproach for her own rashness. We don't understand girls, but we ask this question of those who do : Is it possible that Miss Sally was impressed by the splendid arm with the name tattooed on it—an arm in which every muscle told as in a Greek statue, without infringing on its roundness—the arm of Theseus or Ilissus ? Or was it the tone of his voice—a musical one enough ? Or merely his generally handsome face and courteous manner ?

He remained that night at the house, but next day still remembered nothing. He wished to go on his way—destination not known ; but *somewhere*—and would have done so had it not been for Mrs. Nightingale, whose opposition to his going was, thought Dr. Vereker, almost more decisive than the case called for. So he remained on, that day and the next, slowly regaining the use of his right hand. But his memory continued a blank ; and though he was not unable to converse about passing events, he could not fix his attention, or only with a great effort. What was very annoying to Sally was that he was absolutely unable to account for his remark about her name and her mother's in the railway-carriage. He could not even remember making this. He could recall no reason why he should have made it, from any of

the few things that came back to his mind now—hazily, like ghosts. Was he speaking the truth? Why not? Mrs. Nightingale asked. Why not forget that as readily as anything else?

His distress at this inability to remember, to account for himself, to himself or anyone else, was almost painful to witness. The only consolatory circumstance was that his use and knowledge of words remained intact; it was his memory of actual incidents and people in the past that was in fault. Definite effort to follow slight clues remaining in his mind ended in failure, or only served to show that their origin was traceable to literary fiction. But his language-faculty seemed perfectly in order. It came out that he spoke French fluently, and a little Spanish, but he was just as ready with German. It seemed as if he had been recently among French people, if one could judge from such things as his calling his hostess "Madame" when he recovered. These facts came to light in the course of next day, the second of his stay in the house. The favourable impression he had produced on Miss Sally did not diminish, and it seemed much easier and more natural to acquiesce in his remaining than to cast about for a new whereabouts to transfer him to. So his departure was deferred—for a day, at least, or perhaps until the room he occupied should be wanted for other purposes. The postponements on the days that followed were a natural sequence so long as there remained any doubt of his ability to shift for himself.

But in about a month's time the effects of the nervous shock had nearly disappeared, and he had almost recovered the use of his hand—could, in fact, write easily. Besides, as long as he remained, it would be impossible for an old friend of Mrs. Nightingale's, who frequently stayed the night, when he came on an evening visit, to follow a custom which was in the winter almost invariable. In the summer it was less important; and as soon as this friend, an old military gentleman spoken of as "the Major," could be got to understand exactly what had taken place, he readily gave up his quarters at Krakatoa Villa, and returned to his own, at the top of a house in Ball Street, Mayfair.

Nevertheless, the inevitable time came for looking Fenwick's future in the face. It was difficult, as he was unable to contribute a solution of the question, except by his readiness to go out and find work for himself, promising not to come back till he found it.

"You'll see I shall come back to dinner," said he. "I shan't make you late."



Sally asked him what sort of work he should look for.

"I have a sort of inner conviction," he replied, "that I could do almost anything I turned my hand to. Probably it is only a diseased confidence bred of what you might call my artificial inexperience. Every sharp young man's *bona fide* inexperience lands him in that delusion."

"But you must have *some* kind of preference for *something*, however much you forget."

"If I were to choose, I think I should like horse-training. . . . Oh no, of course I can't recall the training of any specific horse. But I know I know all about it, for all that. I can feel the knowledge of it itching in my finger-ends. Yes—I could train horses. Fruit-farming would require capital."

"Who said anything about fruit-farming?"

Fenwick laughed aloud. It was a great big laugh, that made Rosalind, who was giving directions in the kitchen, just across the passage, call out to know what they were laughing at.

"I'll be hanged if I know," said he, "*why* I said fruit-farming—I must have had something to do with it. It's all very odd."

"But the horses—the horses," said Sally, who did not want him to wander from the point. "How should you go about it? Should you walk into Tattersall's without a character, and ask for a place?"

"Not a bit of it! I should saunter into 'Tat's' like a swell, and ask them if they couldn't find me a raw colt to try my hand on for a wager. Say I had laid a hundred I would quiet down the most vicious quadruped they could find in an hour."

"But that would be fibs."

"Oh no! I could do it. But I don't know why I know. . . ."

"I didn't mean that. I meant you wouldn't have laid the wager."

"Yes, I should. I lay it you now! Come, Miss Sally!—a hundred pounds to a brass farthing I knock all the vice out of the worst beast they can find in an hour. I shouldn't say the wager had been accepted, you know."

"Well, anyhow I shan't accept it. You haven't got a hundred pounds to pay with. To be sure, I haven't got a brass farthing that I know of. It's as broad as it is long."

"Yes, it's that," he replied musingly—"as broad as it is long. I *haven't* got a hundred pounds, that I know of." He repeated this twice, becoming very absent and thoughtful.

Sally felt apologetic for reminding him of his position, and immediately said so. She was evidently a girl quite incapable of any reserves or concealments. But she had mistaken his meaning.

"No, no, dear Miss Sally," said he. "Not that—not that at all! I spoke like that because it all seemed so strange to me. Do you know?—of all the things I can't recollect, the one I can't recollect *most*—can you understand?—is ever being in want of money. I *must* have had plenty. I am sure of it."

"I dare say you had. You'll recollect it all presently, and what a lark that will be!" Sally's ingenious optimism made matters very pleasant. She did not like to press the conversation on these lines, lest Mr. Fenwick should refer to a loan she knew her mother had made him; indeed, had it not been for this the poor man would have been hard put to it for clothes and other necessities. All such little matters, which hardly concern the story, had been landed on a comfortable footing at the date of this conversation.

But Mr. Fenwick did not lend himself to the agreeable anticipation of Sally's "lark." There was a pained distraction on his handsome face as he gave his head a great shake, tossing about the mass of brown hair, which was still something of a lion's mane, in spite of the recent ministrations of a hairdresser. He walked to the window-bay that looked out on the little garden, shaking and rubbing his head, and then came back to where he had been sitting—always as one wrestling with some painful half-memory he could not trace. Then he spoke again.

"Whether the sort of flash that comes in my mind of writing my name in a cheque-book is really a recollection of doing so, or merely the knowledge that I *must* have done so, I cannot tell. But it is disagreeable—thoroughly disagreeable—and *strange* to the last degree. I cannot tell you how—how torturing it is, always to be compelled to stop on the threshold of an uncompleted recollection."

"I have the idea, though, quite!" said Sally. "But of course one never remembers signing one's name, any particular time. One does it mechanically. So I don't wonder."

"Yes! But the nasty part of the flash is that I always know that it is not *my* name. Last time it came—just now this minute—it was a name like Harrington or Carrington. Oh dear!" He shook and rubbed his head again, with the old action.

"Perhaps your name isn't Fenwick, but Harrington or Carrington?"



“No ! That cock won’t fight. In a flash, I know it’s not my *own* name as I write it.”

“Oh, but I see !” Sally is triumphant. “You signed for a firm you belonged to, of course. People *do* sign for firms, don’t they ?” added she, with misgivings about her own business capacity. But Mr. Fenwick did not accept this solution, and continued silent and depressed.

The foregoing is one of many similar conversations between Fenwick and Sally, or her mother, or all three, during the term of his stay at Krakatoa Villa. They were less encouraged by the older lady, who counselled Fenwick to accept his oblivion passively, and await the natural return of his mental powers. They would all come in time, she said ; and young Dr. Vereker, though his studious and responsible face grew still more studious and responsible as time went on, and the mind of this case continued a blank, still encouraged passivity, and spoke confidently—whatever he thought—of an early and complete recovery.

When, in Fenwick’s absence, Sally reported to Dr. Vereker and her mother the scheme for applying to “Tat’s” for a wild horse to break in, the latter opposed and denounced it so strongly, on the ground of the danger of the experiment, that both Sally and the doctor promised to support her if Fenwick should broach the idea again. But when he did so, it was so clear that the disfavour Mrs. Nightingale showed for such a risky business would be sufficient to deter him from trying it, that neither thought it necessary to say a word in her support ; and the conversation went off into a discussion of how it came about that Fenwick should remember Tattersall’s. But, said he, he did not remember Tattersall’s even now. And yet hearing the name, he had automatically called it “Tat’s.” Many other instances showed that his power of imagery, in relation to the past, was paralysed, while his language-faculty remained intact, just as many fluent speakers and writers spell badly. Only it was an extreme case.

A fortunate occurrence that happened at this time gave its quietus to the unpopular horse-breaking speculation. It happened that, as Mrs. Nightingale was shopping at a big “universal providing” stores not far away, one of the clerks had some difficulty in interpreting a French phrase in a letter just received from abroad. No one near him looked more likely to help than Mrs. Nightingale, but she could do nothing when applied to ; although, she said, she had been taught French in her youth. But she felt certain Mr. Fenwick could be of use—at her house.



French idiom was evidently unfamiliar in the neighbourhood, for the young gentleman from the office jumped at the opportunity. He went away with Mrs. Nightingale's card, inscribed with a message, and came back before she had done shopping (not that that means such a very short time), not only with an interpretation, but with an exhaustive draft of an answer in French, which she saw to be both skilful and scholarly. It was so much so that a fortnight later an enquiry came to know if Mr. Fenwick's services would be available for a firm in the City, which had applied to be universally provided with a man having exactly his attainments and no others. In less than a month he was installed in a responsible position as their foreign correspondent and in receipt of a very respectable salary. The rapidity of phrasing in this movement was abnormal—*prestissimo*, in fact, if we indulge our musical vocabulary. But the instrumentation would have seemed less surprising to Sally had she known the lengths her mother had gone in the proffer of a substantial guarantee for Fenwick's personal honesty. This seeming rashness did not transpire at the time ; had it done so, it might have appeared unintelligible—to Sally, at any rate. She would not have been surprised at herself for backing the interests of a man nearly electrocuted over her half-crown, but why should her mother endorse her protégé so enthusiastically ?

It is perhaps hardly necessary for us to dwell on the unsuccessful attempts that were made to recover touch with other actors on the stage of Fenwick's vanished past. Advertisement—variously worded—in the second column of the *Times*, three times a week for a month, produced no effect. Miss Sally frequently referred with satisfaction to the case of John Williams, reported among the *Psychical Researches* of the past years, in which a man who vanished in England was found years after carrying on a goods-store in Chicago under another name, with a new wife and family, having utterly forgotten the first half of his life and all his belongings. Her mother seemed only languidly interested in this illustration, and left the active discussion of the subject chiefly to Sally, who speculated endlessly on the whole of the story ; without, however, throwing any fresh light on it—unless indeed, the Chicago man could be considered one. And the question naturally arose, as long as his case continued to hold out hopes of a sudden return of memory, and until we were certain his condition was chronic, why go to expense and court publicity ? By the time he was safely installed in his situation at the wine-

merchant's, the idea of a police-enquiry, application to the magistrates, and so forth, had become distasteful to all concerned, and to none more so than Fenwick himself.

When Dr. Vereker, acting on his own account, and unknown to Mrs. Nightingale and Fenwick, made confidential reference to Scotland Yard, that Yard smiled cynically over the Chicago storekeeper, and expressed the opinion that probably Fenwick's game was a similar game, and that things of this sort were usually some game. The doctor observed that he knew without being told that nine such cases out of ten had human rascality at the bottom of them, but that he had consulted that Yard in the belief that this might be a tenth case. The Yard said very proper, and it would do its best, and no doubt did, but nothing was elucidated.

It is just possible that had Mr. Fenwick communicated *every* clue he found, down to the smallest trifle, Dr. Vereker might have been able to get at something through the Criminal Investigation Department. But it wasn't fair to Sherlock Holmes to keep anything back. Fenwick, knowing nothing of Vereker's enquiry, did so ; for he had decided to say nothing about a certain pawn-ticket that was in the pocket of an otherwise empty purse or pocket-book, evidently just bought. He would, however, investigate it himself, and did so.

It was quite three weeks, though, before he felt safe to go about alone to any place distant from the house, more especially when he did not know what the expedition would lead to. When at last he got to the pawnbroker's, he found that that gentleman at the counter did not recognise him, or said he did not. Fenwick, of course, could not ask the question : " Did I pawn this watch ? " It would have seemed lunacy. But he framed a question that answered as well, to his thinking.

" Would you very kindly tell me," he asked, dropping his voice, " whether the person that pawned this watch was at all like me—like a brother of mine, for instance ? " Perhaps he was not a good hand at pretences, and the pawnbroker outclassed him easily.

" No, sir," replied he, without looking to see ; " that I most certainly can *not* tell you." Fenwick was not convinced that this was true, but had to admit to himself that it might be. This man's life was one long record of an infinity of short loans, and its problem was the advancing of the smallest conceivable sums on the largest obtainable security. Why *should* he recollect



one drop in the ocean of needy applicants ? The only answer Fenwick could give to this was based on his belief that he looked quite unlike the other customers. More knowledge would have shown him that there was not one of those customers, scarcely, but had a like belief. It is the common form of human thought among those who seek to have pawns broked. They are a class made up entirely of exceptions.

Fenwick came away from the shop with the watch that *must have been* his. That was how he thought of it. As soon as he wore it again, it became *his* watch, naturally. But he could remember nothing about it. And its recovery from the pawnbroker's he could not remember leaving it at became an absurd dream. Perhaps in Sherlock Holmes's hands it would have provided a valuable clue. Fenwick said nothing further about it ; put it in a drawer until all enquiries about him had died into the past.

Another little thing that might have helped was the cabman's number written on his wristband. But here Fate threw investigation off her guard. The ciphers were, as it chanced, 3,600 ; and an unfortunate shrewdness of Scotland Yard, when Dr. Vereker communicated this clue, spotted the date in it—the third day of the sixth month of 1900. So no one dreamed of the cabby, who could at least have shown where the hat was lost that might have had a name or address inside it, and where he left its owner in the end. And there was absolutely no clue to anything elsewhere among his clothes. The panama hat might have been bought anywhere ; the suit of blue serge was ticketless inside the collar, and the shirt unmarked—probably bought for the voyage only. Fenwick had succeeded in forgetting himself just at a moment when he was absolutely without a reminder. And it seemed there was nothing for it but to wait for the revival of memory.

This, then, is how it came about that, within three months of his extraordinary accident, Mr. Fenwick was comfortably settled in an apartment within a few minutes' walk of Krakatoa Villa ; and all the incidents of his original appearance were getting merged in the insoluble, and would soon, no doubt, under the influence of a steady ever-present new routine of life, be completely absorbed in the actual past.



## CHAPTER V

WHEN one is called away in the middle of a street-fight, and misses seeing the end of it, how embittered one's existence is, and continues for some time after ! Think what our friend the cabman would have felt had he missed the *dénouement* ! And when one finds oneself again on its site—if that is the correct expression—how one wishes one was not ashamed to enquire about its result from the permanent officials on the spot—the waterman attached to the cab-rank, the crossing-sweeper at the corner, the neolithographic artist who didn't really draw that half-mackerel himself, but is there all day long, for all that ; or even the apothecary's shop over the way, on the chance that the casualties went or were taken there for treatment after the battle. One never does ask, because one is so proud ; but if one did ask, one would probably find that oblivion had drawn a veil over the event, and that none of one's catechumens had heard speak of any such an occurrence, and that it must have been another street. Because, if it had 'a been there, they would have seen to a certainty. And the monotonous traffic rolls on, on, on ; and the two counter-streams of creatures, each with a story, divide and subdivide over the spot where the underneath man's head sounded on the kerbstone, which took no notice at the time, and now seems to know less than ever about it.

Are we, in thus moralising, merely taking the mean advantage the author is apt to imagine he has established over his reader when he ends off a chapter with a snap, and hopes the said reader will not dare to skip ? No, we are not. We really mean something, and shall get to it in time. Let us only be clear what it is ourselves.

It refers, at any rate, to the way in which the contents of Chapters I. and II. had become records of the past six months later, when the snow was on the ground four inches thick on Christmas morning—two inches, at least, having been last

night's contribution—and made it all sweet and smooth all over so that there need be no unpleasantness. As Sally looked out of her mother's bedroom window towards the front through the Venetian blind, she saw the footprints of cats alone on the snow in the road, and of the milk alone along the pavement. For the milk had preferred to come by hand, rather than plough its tricycle through the unknown depths and drifts of Glenmoira Road, W., to which it had found its way over tracks already palliated by the courage of the early 'bus—not plying for hire at that hour, but only seeking its equivalent of the *carceres* of the Roman Coliseum, to inaugurate the carriage of twelve inside and fourteen out to many kinds of Divine Service early in the day, and one kind only of dinner-service late—the one folk eat too much pudding and mince-pie at, and have to take a dose after. During this early introductory movement of the 'bus its conductor sits inside like a lord, and classifies documents. But he has nothing to do with our story. Let us thank him for facilitating the milk, and dismiss him.

“My gracious goodness me!” said Sally, when she saw the snow. She did not say it quite from the bottom of her heart, and as her own form of expression; but in inverted commas, as it were, the primary responsibility being cook's or Jane's. “You mustn't think of getting up, mother.”

“Oh, nonsense! I shall get up the minute the hot water comes.”

“You won't do any good by getting up. You had much better lie in bed. I shouldn't get up, if I was you,” etc., etc.

“Oh, stuff! My rheumatism's better. Do you know, I really think the ring *has* done it good. Dr. Vereker may laugh as much as he likes——”

“Well, the proof of the pudding's in the eating. But wait till you see how thick the snow is. *Come—in!*” This is very staccato. Jane was knocking at the door with cans of really hot water this time. “I said come in before. Merry Christmas and happy New Year, Jane!... Oh, I say! What a dear little robin! He's such a little duck, I hope that cat won't get him!” And Sally, who is huddled up in a thick dressing-gown and is shivering, is so excited that she goes on looking through the blind, and the peep-hole she has had to make to see clear through the frosted pane, in spite of the deadly cold on the finger-tip she rubbed it with. Her mother felt interested, too, in the fate of the robin, but not to the extent of impairing her

last two minutes in bed by admitting the slightest breath of cold air inside a well-considered fortress. She was really going to get up, though, that was flat ! The fire would blaze directly, although at this moment it was blowing wood-smoke down Jane's throat, and making her choke.

Directly was five or six minutes, but the fire did blaze up royally in the end. You see, it wasn't a slow-combustion grate, and it burned too much fuel, and flared away the coal, and did all sorts of comfortable, uneconomical things. So did Jane, who had put in a whole bundle of wood.

But now that the wood was past praying for, and Jane had departed, after thawing the hearts of two sponges, it was just as well to take advantage of the blaze while it lasted. And Mrs. Nightingale and her daughter, in the thickest available dressing-gowns, and pretending they were not taking baths only because the bath-room was thrown out of gear by the frost, took advantage of the said blaze to their heart's content, and harked back—a good way back—on the conversation.

“ You never said ‘ Come in,’ chick.”

“ I *did*, mother ! Well, if I didn't, at any rate, I always tell her not to knock. She is the stupidest girl. She *will* knock !” Her mother doesn't press the point. There is no bad blood anywhere. Did not Sally wish the handmaiden a merry Christmas ?

“ The cat didn't get the robin, Sally ?”

“ Not he ! The robin was too sharp by half. Such a little darling ! But I was sorry for the cat.”

“ Poor pussy ! Not our pussy, was it ?”

“ Oh no ; it was that piebald tom that lives in at the empty house next door.”

“ I know. Horrible beast !”

“ Well, but just think of being out in the cold in this weather, with nothing to eat ! Oo—oo—oogh !” Sally illustrates, with an intentional shudder. “ I wonder who that is !”

“ I didn't hear anyone.”

“ You'll see, he'll ring directly. I know who it is ; it's Mr. Fenwick come to say he can't come to-night. I heard the click of his skates. They've a sort of twinkly click, skates have, when they're swung by a strap. He'll go out and skate all day. He'll go to Wimbledon.”

The girl's hearing was quite correct. A ring came at the bell—Krakatoa had no knocker—and a short colloquy followed



between Jane and the ringer. Then he departed, with his twinkly click and noiseless footstep on the snow, slamming the front gate. Jane was able to include a card he had left in a recrudescence or reinforcement of hot water. Sally takes the card and looks at it, and her mother says, "Well, Sally?" with a slight remonstrance against the unfairness of keeping back information after you have satisfied your own curiosity—a thing people are odious about, as we all know.

"He's coming all right," says Sally, looking at both sides of the card, and passing it on when she has quite done with it. Sally, we may mention, as it occurs to us at this moment,—though *why* we have no idea—means to have a double chin when she is five years older than her mother is now. At present it—the chin—is merely so much youthful roundness and softness, very white underneath. Her mother is quite of a different type. Her daughter's father must have had black hair, for Sally can make huge shining coils, or close plaits, very wide, out of her inheritance. Or it will assume the form of a bush, if indulged, till Sally is almost hidden under it, as the Bosjesman under his version of Birnam Wood, that he shoots his assegai from. But the mother's is brown, with a tinge of chestnut; going well with her eyes, which have a claret tone, or what is so called; but we believe people really mean pale old port when they say so. She has had—still has, we might say—a remarkably fine figure, and we don't feel the same faith in Miss Sally's. That young lassie will get described as plump some day, if she doesn't take care.

But really it is a breach of confidence to get behind the scenes and describe two ladies in this way, when they are so very much in *déshabille*—have not even washed! We will look at them again when they have got their things on. However, they may go on talking now. The blaze has lost its splendour, and dressing cannot be indefinitely delayed. But they can and do talk from room to room, confident that cook and Jane are in the basement out of hearing.

"We shall do nicely, kitten! Six at table. I'm glad Mr. Fenwick can come. Aren't you?"

"Rather! Fancy having Dr. and Mrs. Vereker and the dear old fossil and nobody to help out!"

"My dear! You say 'Dr. and Mrs. Vereker' as if he was a married man!"

"Well—him and his mammy, then! He's good—but he's

professional. Oh dear—his professional manner ! You have to be forming square to receive cavalry every five minutes to prevent his writing you a prescription.”

“ Ungrateful little monkey ! You know the last he wrote you did you no end of good.”

“ Yes, but I didn’t ask him for it. He wrote it by force. I hate being hectorred over and bullied. I say, mother !”

“ What, kitten ?”

“ I hope, as Mr. Fenwick’s coming, you’ll wear your wedding-ring.”

“ Wear *what* ?”

“ Wear your wedding-ring. *His* ring, you know ! You know what I mean—the rheumatic one.”

“ Of course I know perfectly well what you mean,” says her mother, with a shade of impatience in her voice. “ But why ?”

“ Why ? Because it gives him pleasure always to see it on your finger—he fancies it’s doing good to the neuritis.”

“ Perhaps it is.”

“ Very well, then ; why not wear it ?”

“ Because it’s so big, and comes off in the soup, and is a nuisance. And then, he didn’t give it to me, either. He was to have had a shilling for it.”

“ But he never *did* have it. And it wasn’t a shilling. It was sixpence. And he says it’s the only little return he’s ever been able to make for what he calls our kindness.”

“ I couldn’t shovel him out into the street.”

“ Put his wedding-ring on, mammy, to oblige me !”

“ Very well, chick—I don’t mind.” And so that point is settled. But something makes the daughter repeat, as she comes into her mother’s room dry-towelling herself, “ You’re sure you don’t mind, mammy ?” to which the reply is, “ No, no ! *Why* should I mind ? It’s all quite right,” with a forced decision, equivalent to wavering, about it. Sally looks at her a moment in a pause of dry-towelling, and goes back to her room not quite convinced. Persons of the same blood, living constantly together, are sometimes quite embarrassed by their own brain-waves, and very often misled.

Exigencies of teeth and hair cut the talk short about Mr. Fenwick. But he gets renewed at breakfast, and, in fact, goes on more or less until brought up short by the early service at St. Satisfax, when he is extinguished by a preliminary hymn. But not before his whole story, so far as is known, has been



passed in review. So that an attentive listener might have gathered from their disjointed chat most of the particulars of his strange appearance on the scene, and of the incidents of the next few weeks, and their result in the foundation of what seemed likely to be a permanent friendship between himself and Krakatoa Villa, and what certainly was (all things considered) that most lucrative and lucky post in a good wine-merchant's house in the City. For Mr. Fenwick had nothing to recommend him but his address and capacity, brought into notice by an accidental concurrence of circumstances.

It had been difficult to talk much about him to himself without seeming to wish to probe into his past life ; and as Mrs. Nightingale impressed on Sally for the twentieth time, just as they arrived at St. Satisfax, they really knew nothing of it. How could they even know that this oblivion was altogether genuine ? It might easily have been so at first, but who could say how much of his past had come back to him during the last six months ? An unwelcome past, perhaps, and one he was glad to help Oblivion in extinguishing.

As this was on the semi-circular path in front of the Saint's shrine, between two ramparts of swept-up snow, and on a corrective of cinder-grit, Sally ascribed this speculation to a disposition on her mother's part to preach, she having come, as it were, within the scope and atmosphere of a pending decalogue. Also, she thought the ostentatious way in which Mr. Fenwick had gone away to skate had something to do with it.

But she was at all times conscious of a certain access of severity in her mother as she approached altars—rather beyond the common attitude of mind one ascribes to the bearer of a prayer-book when one doesn't mean to go to church oneself. (We are indebted for this piece of information to an intermittent churchgoer ; it is on a subject on which our own impressions have little value.) In the present case Sally *was* going to church, so she had to account to herself for a *nuance* in her mother's manner—after dwelling on the needlessness and inadvisability of pressing Mr. Fenwick as to his recollections—by ascribing it to the consciousness of some secularism elsewhere ; and he was the nearest case of ungodliness to hand.

"I wonder whether he believes anything at all !" said Sally, assuming the consecutiveness of her remark.

"I don't see why he shouldn't. . . . Why should he disbelieve more than . . . ? All I mean is, I don't know." The



speaker ended abruptly; but then, that may have been because they were at the church door. Possibly as a protest against having carried chat almost into the precinct, Mrs. Nightingale's preliminary burial of her face in her hands lasted a long time—in fact, Sally almost thought she had gone to sleep, and told her so afterwards. “Perhaps, though,” she added, “it was me came up from under the bedclothes too soon.” Then she thought her levity displeased her mother, and kissed her. But it wasn't that. She was thoughtful over something else.

This time, in the church, it may be Sally noticed her mother's abstraction (or was it, perhaps, devotional tension?) less than she had done when her attention had been caught once or twice lately by a similar strained look. For Miss Sally had her eyes on a little gratifying incident of her own—a trifle that would already have appeared as an incident in her diary, had she kept one, somewhat thus:—“Saw that young idiot from Cattley's Stores again in church to-day, in a new scarlet necktie. I wonder whether it's me, or Miss Peplow that gollops, or the large Miss Baker.” Which would have shown that she was not always a nun breathless with adoration during religious exercises. The fact is, Sally would have made a very poor St. Teresa indeed.

The young idiot was the same young man who had brought the difficult French idiom to Krakatoa, while Mr. Fenwick was still without an anchorage of his own. Martha the cook, who admitted him, not feeling equal to the negotiation, had merely said—would he mind steppin' in the parlour, and she would send Miss Sally up? and had departed bearing Mrs. Nightingale's credential-card in a hand as free from grease as an apron so deeply committed could make it, and brought Miss Nightingale in from the garden, where she was gardening—possibly effectually, but what do we know? When you are gardening on a summer afternoon, you may look very fetching, if you are nineteen, and the right sex for the adjective. Miss Sally did, being both, and for our own part we think it was inconsiderate and thoughtless of cook. Sally was sprung upon that young man like a torpedo on a ship with no guards out, saying with fascinating geniality through a smile (as one interests oneself in a civility that means nothing) that Mr. Fenwick had just gone out, and she didn't know when he would be back. But why not ask Mrs. Prince at the school, opposite St. Satisfax, where we went to church; she was French, and would be sure to know

what it meant. *She* wouldn't mind ! " Say I sent you." And the youth, whom the torpedo had struck amidships, was just departing, conscious of reluctance, when Mr. Fenwick appeared, having come back for his umbrella.

Sally played quite fair. She didn't hang about, as she might have done, to rub her pearly teeth and merry eyebrows into her victim. She went back and gardened honourably, while Mr. Fenwick solved the riddle and supplied the letter. But for all that, the young man appeared next Sunday at St. Satisfax's, with an extremely new prayer-book that looked as if his religious convictions were recent, and never took his eyes off Sally all through the service—that is, if he did as she supposed, and peeped all the while that his head ought to have been, as she metaphorically expressed it, " under the clothes."

Now, this was naturally a little unaccountable to Sally, after such a very short interview ; and on the part, too, of a young gentleman who passed all the working hours of the day among working houris, as it were soaked and saturated in their fascinations, and not at liberty to squeeze their hands or ask them for one little lock of hair all through shop-time. Sally did not realise the force of sameness, nor the amount of contempt familiarity will breed. Perhaps the houris got tired and snappish, poor things ! and used up their artificial smiles on the customers. Perhaps it had leaked out that the trying-on hands contributed only length, personally, to the loveliness of the trying-on figures. All sorts of things might have happened to influence this young man towards St. Satisfax ; and how did Sally know how often he had seen the other young lady communicants she had speculated about ? Her mind had certainly thrown in the large Miss Baker with something of derision. But that Sylvia Peplow was just the sort of girl men run after, like a big pale gloire-de-Dijon rose all on one side, with pale golden wavy hair, and great big goggly blue eyes, looking as if she couldn't help it ! Now that we have given you details, from Sally's inner consciousness, of Miss Peplow's appearance, we hope you will perceive why she said she " golloped." We don't, exactly.

However, on this Christmas morning it was made clear whom this young donkey was hankering after—this is Sally's way of putting it—as Miss Peplow failed to get her usual place through being late, and had to sit in a side-aisle, instead of the opposite of her to the Idiot—we are again borrowing from Sally—and now the Idiot would have to glare round over his shoulder at her or

go without ! It was soon evident that he was quite content to go without, and that Sally herself had been his lode-star. The certainty of this was what prevented her taking so much notice of her mother as she might otherwise have done.

Had she done so closely, she would hardly have put down her preoccupation, or tension, or whatever it was, to displeasure at Mr. Fenwick's going to skate on Christmas morning instead of going to church. What concern was it of theirs what Mr. Fenwick did ?



## CHAPTER VI

THE “ dear old fossil ” referred to by Miss Sally was one of those occurrences—auxiliaries or encumbrances, as may be—whom one is liable to meet with in almost any family, who are so forcibly taken for granted by all its members that the infection of their acceptance catches on, and no new-comer ever asks that they should be explained. If they were relatives, they would be easy of explanation ; but the only direct information you ever get about them is that they are not. This seems to block all avenues of investigation, and presently you find yourself taking them as a matter of course, like the Lion and Unicorn, or the image on a stamp.

Fenwick accepted “ the Major,” as the old fossil was called, so frankly and completely under that name that he was still uncertain about his real designation at the current moment of the story. Nobody ever called him anything but “ the Major,” and he would as soon have asked “ Major what ? ” as called in question the title of the King of Hearts instead of playing him on the Queen, and taking the trick. So far as he could conjecture, the Major had accepted him in the same way. When the railway adventure was detailed to him, the fossil said many times, “ How *perfectly* extraordinary ! ” “ God bless my soul ! ” “ You don’t mean *that* ! ” and so on ; but his astonishment always knocked his double eyeglass off, and, when he couldn’t find it, it had to be recovered before he could say, “ Eh—eh—what was that ? ” and get in line again ; so he made a disjointed listener.

But these fossils see more than they hear sometimes ; and this old Major, for all he was so silent, must have noticed many little things that Christmas evening to cause him to say what he did next day to Sally. For, of course, the Major couldn’t go back to his lodgings in Ball Street in weather like this ; so he stayed the night in the spare room, where Mr. Fenwick had

been put up temporary, cook said—a room which was, in fact, usually spoken of as “the Major’s room.”

Of course, Sally was the sort of girl who would never see anything of that sort—you’ll see what sort directly—though she was as sharp as a razor in a general way. What made her blind in this case was that, in certain things, aspects, relations of life, she had ruled her mother out of court as an intrinsically grown-up person—one to whom some speculations would not apply. So she saw nothing in the fact that, when Mr. Fenwick’s knock came at the door, her mother said, “There he is,” and went out to meet him ; nor even in her stopping with him outside on the landing, chatting confidentially and laughing. Why shouldn’t she ?

She saw nothing—nothing whatever—in Mr. Fenwick’s bringing her mother a beautiful sealskin jacket as a Christmas present. Why shouldn’t he ? The only thing that puzzled Sally was, where on earth did he get the money to buy it ? But then, of course, he was “in the City,” and the City is a sort of Tom Tiddler’s ground. Sally found that enough, on reflection.

She saw nothing, either, in her mother’s carrying her present away upstairs, and saying nothing about it till afterwards. Nor did she notice any abnormal satisfaction on Mr. Fenwick’s countenance as he came into the drawing-room by himself, such as one might discern in a hen—if hens had countenances—after a special egg. Nor did she attach any particular meaning to an expression on the elderly face of the doctor’s mother that any student of Lavater would at once have seen to mean that *we* saw what was going on, but were going to be maternally discreet about it, and only mention it to every one we met in the very strictest confidence. This lady, who had rather reluctantly joined the party—for she was a martyr to ailments—was somewhat grudgingly admitted by Sally to be a comfortable sort of old thing enough, if only she didn’t “goozle” over you so. She had no *locus standi* for goozling, whatever it was ; for had not Sally as good as told her son that she didn’t want to marry him or anybody else ? If you ask us what would be the connecting link between Sally’s attitude towards the doctor and the goozlings of a third party, we have no answer ready.

No ; Sally went to bed as wise as ever—so she afterwards told the fossil Major—at the end of the evening. She had enjoyed herself immensely, though the simple material for rapture was only foursquare Halma played by the four acuter intelligences of the six, and draughts for the goozler and the fossil. But then,

Sally had a rare faculty for enjoying herself, and she was perfectly contented with only one admirer to torment, though he was only old Prosy, as she called him, but not to his face. She was jolly glad mother had put on her maroon-coloured watered silk with velvet facings, because you couldn't deny that she looked lovely in it. And as for Mr. Fenwick, he looked just like Hercules and Sir Walter Raleigh, after being out skating all day long in the cold. And Sally's wisdom had not been in the least increased by what was, after all, only a scientific experiment on poor Mr. Fenwick's mental torpor when her mother, the goozler and old Prosy having departed, got out her music to sing that very old song of hers to him that he had thought the other day seemed to bring back a sort of memory of something. Was it not possible that if he heard it often enough his past might revive slowly ? You never could tell !

So when, on Boxing Day morning, Sally's mother, who had got down early and hurried her breakfast to make a dash for early prayer at St. Satisfax, looked in at her backward daughter and reproached her, and said there was the Major coming down, and no one to get him his chocolate, she spoke to a young lady who was serenely unprepared for any revelations of a startling nature, or, indeed, any revelations at all. Nor did getting the Major his chocolate excite any suspicions.

So Sally was truly taken aback when the old gentleman, having drunk his chocolate, broke a silence which had lasted since a brief and fossil-like good-morning, with, "Well, missy, and what do *you* say to the idea of a stepfather ?" But not immediately, for at first she didn't understand him, and answered placidly : "It depends on who."

"Mr. Fenwick, for instance !"

"Yes, but who for ? And stepfather to step-what ? Step-daughter or stepson ?"

"Yourself, little goose ! *You* would be the stepdaughter."

Sally was then so taken aback that she could make nothing of it, but stood in a cloud of mystification. The Major had to help her. "How would you like your mother to marry Mr. Fenwick ?" He was one of those useful people who never *finesse*, who let you know point-blank where you are, and to whom you feel so grateful for being unfeeling. While others there be who keep you dancing about in suspense, while they break things gently, and all the while are scoring up a little account against you for considerateness.



Sally's bewilderment, however, recognised one thing distinctly—that the Major's enquiry was not to get, but to give, information. He didn't the least want to know what *she* thought; he was only working to give her a useful tip. So she would take her time about answering. She took it, looking as grave as a little downy owl-tot. Meanwhile, to show there was no bad feeling, she went and sat candidly on the fossil's knee, and attended to his old whiskers and moustache.

"Major dear!" said she presently.

"What, my child?"

"Wouldn't they make an awfully handsome couple?" The Major replied, "Handsome is as handsome does," and seemed to suggest that questions of this sort belonged to a pre-fossilised condition of existence.

"Now, Major dear, why not admit it when you know it's true? You know quite well they would make a lovely couple. Just fancy them going up the aisle at St. Satisfax! It would be like mediæval Kings and Queens." For Sally was still in that happy phase of girlhood in which a marriage is a wedding, *et præterea aliquid*, but not much. "But," she continued, "I couldn't give up any of mamma—no, not so much as *that*—if she was to marry twenty Mr. Fenwicks." As the quantity indicated was the smallest little finger-end that could be checked off with a thumb-nail, the twenty husbands would have come in for a very poor allowance of matrimony. The Major didn't seem to think the method of estimation supplied a safe ground for discussion, and allowed it to lapse.

"I may be quite wrong, you know, my dear," said he. "I dare say I'm only an old fool. So we won't say anything to mamma, will us, little woman?"

"I don't know, Major dear. I'll promise not to say anything to her *because* of what you've said to me. But if I suspect it myself on my account later on, of course I shall."

"What shall you say to her?"

"Ask her if it's true! Why not? But what was it made *you* think so?" Whereon the Major gave in detail his impressions of the little incidents recorded above, which Sally had seen nothing in. He laid a good deal of stress on the fact that her mother had suppressed the Christmas present until after Dr. Vereker and his mother had departed. She wouldn't have minded the doctor, he said, but she would naturally want to keep the old bird out of the swim. Besides, there was Fenwick him-

self—one could see what *he* thought of it ! She could perfectly well stop him if she chose, and she didn't choose.

"Stop him whatting ?" asked Sally perplexingly. But she admitted the possibility of an answer by not pressing the question home. Then she went on to say that all these things had happened exactly under her nose, and she had never seen anything in them. The only concession she was inclined to make was in respect of the impression her mother evidently made on Mr. Fenwick. But that was nothing wonderful. Anything else would have been very surprising. Only it didn't follow from that that mother wanted to marry Mr. Fenwick, or Mr. Anybody. As far as he himself went, she liked him awfully—but then he couldn't recollect who he was, poor fellow ! It was most pathetic sometimes to see him trying. If only he could have remembered that he hadn't been a pirate, or a forger, or a wicked Marquis ! But to know absolutely nothing at all about himself ! Why, the only thing that was known now about his past life was that he once knew a Rosalind Nightingale—what he said to her in the railway-carriage. And now he had forgotten that, too, like everything else.

"I say, Major dear"—Sally has an influx of a new idea—"it ought to be possible to find out something about that Rosalind Nightingale he knew. Mamma says it's nonsense her being any relation, because she'd know."

"And suppose we did find out who she was ?"

"Well, then, if we could get at her, we might get her to tell us who he was. And then we could tell him."

Perhaps it is only his fossil-like way of treating the subject, but certainly the Major shows a very slack interest, Sally thinks, in the identity of this namesake of hers. He does, however, ask absently, what sort of way did he speak of her in the train ?

"Why—he said so little——"

"But he gave you some impression ?"

"Oh, of course. He spoke as if she was a person—not a female you know—a person !"

"A person isn't a female—when ? Eh, missy ?" This requires a little consideration, and gets it. The result, when it comes, seems good in its author's eyes.

"When they sit down. When you ask them to, you know. In the parlour, I mean—not the hall. They might be a female then."

"Did he mean a lady ?"

"And take milk and no sugar ? And pull her gloves on to go ?



And leave cards turned up at the corner ? Oh no—not a lady, certainly !”

As she makes these instructive distinctions, Miss Sally is kneeling on a hassock before a mature fire, which will tumble down and spoil presently. When it does it will be time to resort to that hearth-broom, and restrict combustion with collected caput-mortuum of Derby-Brights, selected, twenty-seven shillings. Till then, Sally, who deserted the Major’s knee just as she asked what Mr. Fenwick was to stop in, is at liberty to roast, and does so with undisturbed gravity. The Major is becoming conscious of a smell like Joan of Arc at the beginning of the entertainment, when her mother comes in on a high moral platform, and taxes her with singeing, and dissolves the parliament, and rings to take away breakfast, and forecasts an open window the minute the Major has gone.

Sally doesn’t wait for the open window, but as one recalled to the active duties of life from liquefaction in a Turkish bath, takes a cold plunge as far as the front gate without so much as a hat on—to see if the post is coming, which is absurd—and comes back braced. But though she only wonders what can have put such an idea as her mother marrying Mr. Fenwick in the Major’s dear silly old head, she keeps on a steady current of speculation about who that Rosalind Nightingale he knew could possibly have been ; and whether she couldn’t be got at even now. It was such a pity he couldn’t have a tip given about him who he was. If he were once started, he would soon run ; she was sure of that. But did he want to run ?—that was a point to consider. Did he really forget as much as he said he did ? How came he not to have forgotten his languages he was so fluent with ? And how about his book-keeping ? And that curious way he had of knowing about places, and then looking puzzled when asked when he had been there. When they talked about Klondyke the other day, for instance, and he seemed to know so much about it. . . . But then, see how he grasped his head, and ruffled his hair, and shut his eyes, and clenched his teeth over his efforts to recollect whether he had really been there himself, or only read it all in the “Century” or “Atlantic Monthly” ! Surely he was in earnest then.

Sally’s speculations lasted her all the way to No. 260, Ladbroke Grove Road, where she was going to a music-lesson, or rather music-practice, with a friend who played the violin ; for Sally was learning the viola—to be useful.



## CHAPTER VII

YOU who read this may have met with some cross-chance such as we are going to try to describe to you ; possibly with the same effect upon yourself as the one we have to confess to in our own case—namely, that you have been left face to face with a problem to which you have never been able to supply a solution. You have given up a conundrum in despair, and no one has told you the answer.

Here are the particulars of an imaginary case of the sort. You have made acquaintance—made friends—years ago with some man or woman without any special introduction, and without feeling any particular curiosity about his or her antecedents. No enquiry seemed to be called for ; all concomitants were so very usual. You may have felt a misgiving as to whether the easy-going ways of your old papa, or the innocent Bohemianisms of his sons and daughters, will be welcome to your new friend, whom you credit with being a little old-fashioned and strait-laced, if anything. But it never occurs to you to doubt or investigate ; why should you, when no question is raised of any great intimacy between you and the So-and-so's, which may stand for the name of his or her family. They ask no certificate from you, of whom they know just as little. Why should you demand credentials of a passer-by because he is so obliging as to offer to lend you a Chinese vocabulary or Whitaker ? Why should your wife try to go behind the cheque-book and the prayer-book of a married couple when all she has had to do with the lady was, suppose, to borrow a square bottle of her, marked off in half-inch lengths, to be shaken before taken ? Why not accept her unimpeachable Sunday morning as sufficient warranty for talking to her on the beach next day, and finding what a very nice person she is ? Because it would very likely be at the seaside. But suppose any sort of introduction of this sort—you know what we mean !

Well, the So-and-so's have slipped gradually into your life ; let this be granted. We need not imagine, for our purpose, any extreme approaches of family intimacy, any love-affairs or deadly quarrels. A tranquil intercourse of some twenty years is all we need, every year of which has added to your conviction of the thorough trustworthiness and respectability of the So-and-so's, of their readiness to help you in any little difficulty, and of the high opinion which the rest of the world has of Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so—the world which knew them when it was a boy, and all their connexions and antecedents, which, you admit, you didn't. . . .

And then, after all these years, it is suddenly burst upon you that there was a shady story about So-and-so that never was cleared up—something about money, perhaps ; or, worse still, one of those stories your informant really doesn't like to be responsible for the particulars of ; you must ask Smith yourself. Or your wife comes to you in fury and indignation that such a scandalous falsehood should have got about as that Clara So-and-so was never married to So-and-so at all till ever so long after Fluffy or Toppy or Croppy or Poppy was born ! We take any names at random of this sort, merely to dwell on your good lady's familiarity with the So-and-so family.

Well, then—there you are ! And what can you make of it ? There you are, face to face with the fact that a man who was a black sheep twenty or thirty years ago has been all this time making believe to be a white sheep so successfully as never was. Or, stranger still, that a woman who has brought up a family of model daughters—daughters whom it would be no exaggeration to speak of as on all fours with your own, and who is quite one of the nicest and most sympathetic people your wife has to go to in trouble—this woman actually—*actually*—if this tale is true, was guilty in her youth . . . there—that will do ! Suppose we say she was no better than she should be. She hadn't even the decency to be a married woman before she did it, which always makes it so much easier to talk to strange ladies and girls about it. You can say all the way down a full dinner-table that Lady Polly Andrews got into the Divorce Court without doing violence to any propriety at all. But the story of Mrs. So-and-so's indiscretion while still Miss Such-and-such must be talked of more guardedly.

And all the while behold the subjects of these stories, in whom, but for this sudden revelation of a shady past, you can detect no moral difference from your amiable and respectable self !

They puzzle you, as they puzzle us, with a doubt whether they really are the same people ; whether they have not changed their identity since the days of their delinquency. If they really are the same, it almost throws a doubt on how far the permanent unforgiveness of sins is expedient. We, of course, refer to Human Expediency only—the construction of a working hypothesis of Life, that would favour peace on earth and good-will towards men ; that would establish a *modus vivendi*, and enable us to be jolly with these reprobates—at any rate, as soon as they had served their time and picked their oakum. We are not intruding on the province of the Theologian—merely discussing the problem of how we can make ourselves pleasant to one another all round, until that final separation of the sheep from the goats, when, however carefully they may have patched up their own little quarrels, they will have to bid each other farewell reluctantly, and make up their minds to the permanent endurance of Heaven and Hell respectively.

We confess that we ourselves think there ought to be a Statute of Limitations, and that after a certain lapse of time any offence, however bad, against morality might be held not to have been committed. If we feel this about culprits who tempted us, at the time of their enormity, to put in every honest hand a whip to lash the rascal naked the length of a couple of lamp-posts, how much more when the offence has been one which our own sense of moral law (a perverted one, we admit) scarcely recognises as any offence at all. And how much more yet, when we find it hard to believe that they—actually *they themselves*, that we know now—can have done the things imputed to them. If the stories are really true, were they not possessed by evil spirits ? Or have they since come to be possessed by better ones than their normal stock-in-trade ?

What is all this prosy speculation about ? Well, it's about our friend in the last chapter, Sally's mother. At least, it is suggested by her. She is one of those perplexing cases we have hinted at, and we acknowledge ourselves unable to account for her at the date of the story, knowing what we do of her twenty years previously. It's little enough, mind, and much of it inferential. Suppose, instead of giving you our inferences, we content ourselves with passing on to you the data on which we found them. Maybe you will see your way to some different life-history for Sally's mother.

The first insight we had into her past was supplied by a friend



of Sally's "old fossil," who was himself a Major, but with a difference. For he was really a Major, whereas the fossil was only called so by Krakatoa Villa, being in truth a Colonel. This one was Major Roper, of the Hurkaru Club, an old schoolfellow of ours, who was giving us a cup of coffee and a cigar at the said Club, and talking himself hoarse about Society. When the Major gets hoarse his voice rises to a squeak, and his eyes start out of his head, and he appears to swell. I forget how Mrs. Nightingale came into the conversation, but she did, somehow.

"She's a very charming woman, that," squeaked the Major—"a *very* charming woman! I don't mind tellin' *you*, you know, that I knew her at Madras—ah! before the divorce. I wouldn't tell Horrocks, nor that dam young fool Silcox, but I don't mind tellin' *you*! Only, look here, my dear boy, don't you go puttin' it about that *I* told you anythin'. You know I make it a rule—a guidin' rule—*never to say anythin'*. You follow that rule through life, my boy! Take the word of an old chap that's seen a deal of service, and just you *hold your tongue*! You make a point—you'll find it pay——" An asthmatic cough came in here.

"There was a divorce, then?" we said. Terms had to be made with the cough, but speech came in the end.

"Oh yes, of course—of course! Don't mind repeatin' that—thing was in the papers at the time. What I was suggestin' holdin' your tongue about was that story about Penderfield and her. . . . Well, as I said just now, I don't mind repeatin' it to you; you ain't Horrocks nor little Silcox—you can keep your tongue in your head. Remember, *I* know nothing; I'm only tellin' what was said at the time. . . . Now, whatever was her name? Was it Rayner, or was it Verschoyle? Pelloo! . . . Pelloo! . . ." The Major tried to call the attention of a man who was deep in an Oriental newspaper at the far end of the next room. But when the Major overstrains his voice, it misses fire like a costermonger's, and only a falsetto note comes on a high register. When this happens he is wroth.

"It's that dam noise they're all makin'," he says, as soon as he has become articulate. "That's the man I want, behind the 'Daily Sunderbund.' If it wasn't for this dam toe, I'd go across and ask him. No, don't you go. Send one of these dam jumpin' frogs—idlin' about!" He requisitions a passing waiter, gripping him by the arm to give him instructions. "Just—you—touch the General's arm, and ketch his attention. Say Major Roper."

And he liquidates his obligations to a great deal of asthmatic cough, while the jumping frog does his bidding.

The General (who is now Lord Pellew of Cutch, by-the-by) came with an amiable smile from behind the journal, and ended a succession of good-evening nods to new-comers by casting an anchor opposite the Major. The latter, having by now taken the surest steps towards bringing the whole room into his confidence, stated the case he sought confirmation for.

Oh yes, certainly ; the General was in Umballa in '80 ; remembered the young lady quite well, and the row between Penderfield and his wife about her. As for Penderfield, everybody remembered *him* ! *De mortuis nil*, etc.—of course, of course. For all that, he was one of the damndest scoundrels that ever deserved to be turned out of the service. Ought to have been cashiered long ago. Good job he's gone to the devil ! Yes, he was quite sure he was remembering the right girl. No, no, he wasn't thinking of Daisy Neversedge—no, nor of little Miss Wrennick : same sort of story, but he wasn't thinking of them at all. Only the name wasn't either Rayner or Verschoyle. General Pellew stood thoughtfully feeling about in a memory at fault, and looking at an unlighted cigar he rolled in his fingers, as though it might help if caressed. Then he had a flash of illumination. "Rosalind Graythorpe," he said.

There we had it, sure enough ! The Major see-sawed in the air with a finger of sudden corroboration. "Rosalind Graythorpe," he repeated triumphantly, and then again, "Ros-a-lind Graythorpe," dwelling on the syllables, and driving the name home, as it were, to the apprehension of all within hearing. It was so necessary to a complete confidence that every one should know whom he was holding his tongue about. Where would be the merit of discretion else ? But the enjoyment of details should be *sotto voce*. The General dropped his voice to a good sample, suggesting a like course to the more demonstrative secrecy of the Major.

"I remember the whole story quite well," said he. "The girl was going out by herself to marry a young fellow up the country at Umballa, I think. They were *fiancés*, and on the way the news came of the outbreak of cholera. So she got hung up for a while at Penderfield's—sort of cousin, I believe, him or his wife—till the district was sanitary again. Bad job for her, as it turned out ! Nobody there to warn her what sort of fellow Penderfield was—and if there had been she wouldn't have



believed 'em. She was a madcap sort of a girl, and regularly in the hands of about as bad a couple as you'll meet with in a long spell—India or anywhere! They used to say out there that the she-Penderfield winked at all her husband's affairs as long as he didn't cut across *her* little arrangements—did more than wink, in fact—lent a helping hand; but only as long as she could rely on his remaining detached, as you might say. The moment she suspected an *entichement* on her husband's part she was up in arms. And he was just the same about her. I remember Lady Sharp saying that if Penderfield had suspected his wife of caring about any of her co-respondents he would have divorced her at once. They were a rum couple, but their attitude to one another was the only good thing about them." The General lighted his cigar, and seemed to consider this was chapter one. The Major appended a foot-note, for our benefit.

"*Leave be* was the word—the word for Penderfield. *You'll* understand that, sir. *No meddlin'!* A good-lookin' Colonel's wife in garrison has her choice, good Lard! Why, she's only got to hold her finger up!" We entirely appreciated the position, and that a siren has a much easier task in the entanglement of a confiding dragoon than falls to the lot of Don Giovanni in the reverse case. But we were more interested in the particular story of Mrs. Nightingale than in the general ethics of profligacy.

"I suppose," we suggested, "that the young woman threatened to be a formidable rival, as there was a row?" Each of the officers nodded at the other, and said that was about it. The Major then started on a little private curriculum of nods on his own account, backed by a half-closed eye of superhuman subtlety, and added once or twice that that *was* about it. We inferred from this that the row had been volcanic in character. The Major then added, repeating the air-sawing action of his forefinger admonitorily, "But, mind you, *I* say nothin'. And my recommendation to you is to say nothin' neither."

"The rest of the story's soon told," said the General, answering our look of enquiry. "Miss Graythorpe went away to Umballa to be married. It was all gossip, mind you, about herself and Penderfield. But gossip always went one way about any girl he was seen with. I have my own belief; so has Jack Roper." The Major underwent a perfect convulsion of nods, winks, and acquiescence. "Well, she went away, and was married to this young shaver, who was very little over twenty. He wasn't in



the service—civil appointment, I think. How long was it, Major, before they parted ? Do you recollect ?”

“Week—ten days—month—six weeks ! Couldn’t say. They didn’t part at the church door ; that’s all I could say for certain. Tell him the rest.”

“They certainly parted very soon, and people told all sorts of stories. The stories got fewer and clearer when it came out that the young woman was in the family way. No one had any right *then* to ascribe the child that was on its road to any father except the young man she had fallen out with. But they did—it was laid at Colonel Penderfield’s door, before there was any sufficient warrant. However, it was all clear enough when the child was born.”

“When was the divorce ?”

“He applied for a divorce a twelvemonth after the marriage. The child was then spoken of as being four months old. My impression is he did not succeed in getting a divorce.”

“Not he,” said the Major, overtopping the General’s quiet, restrained voice with his falsetto. “I recollect *that*, bless you ! The Court commiserated him, but couldn’t give him any relief. So he made a bolt of it. And he’s never been heard of since, as far as I know.”

“What did the mother do ? Where did she go ?” we asked.

“Well, she might have been hard put to it to know what to do. But she met with old Lund—Carrington Lund, you know, not Beauchamp ; he’d a civil appointment at Umritsur—comes here sometimes. You know him ? She’s his Rosey he talks about. He was an old friend of her father, and took her in and protected her—saw her through it. She came with him to England. I was with them on the boat, part of the way. Then she took the name of Macnaghten, I believe. The young husband’s name I can’t remember the least. But it wasn’t Macnaghten.”

The Major squeaked in again :

“No—nor hers neither ! Nightingale, General—that’s the name she goes by. Friend of this gentleman. Very charmin’ person indeed ! Introdooce you ? And a very charmin’ little daughter, goin’ nineteen.” The two officers interchanged glances over our young friend Sally. “She was a nice baby on the boat,” said the General ; and the Major chuckled wheezily, and hoped she didn’t take after her father.

We left him to the tender mercies of gout and asthma and the

enjoyment of a sherry-cobbler through a straw, looking rather too fat for his snuff-coloured trousers with a cord outside, and his flowered silk waistcoat ; but very much too fat for the straw, the slenderness of which was almost painful by contrast.

Perhaps you will see from this why we hinted at the outset of this chapter why Mrs. Nightingale was a conundrum we had given up in despair, of which no one had told us the answer. We wanted your sympathy, you see, and to get it have given you an insight into the way our information was gleaned. Having given you this sample, we will now return to simple narrative of what we know of the true story, and trouble you with no further details of how we came by it.

## CHAPTER VIII

SALLY GRAYTHORPE (our Mrs. Nightingale) was the daughter of a widowed mother, also called Sally, the name in both cases being (as in that of her daughter whom we know) Rosalind, not Sarah. This mother married *en secondes nocés* a former sweetheart ; it had been a case of a match opposed by parents on the ground of the apparent hopelessness of the young man's prospects. Mr. Paul Nightingale, however, falsified the doleful predictions about his future by becoming a successful leader-writer and war-correspondent. It was after the close of the American Civil War, in which he had gained a good deal of distinction, that he met at Saratoga his old flame, Mrs. Graythorpe, then a widow with a little daughter five or six years old. Having then no wishes to consult but their own, and no reason to the contrary appearing, they were married.

They did not find the States a pleasant domicile in the early days following the great war, and came to England. The little daughter soon became like his own child to Mr. Paul Nightingale, and had his wish been complied with, she would have taken his name during his life. But her mother saw no reason, apparently, for extinguishing Mr. Graythorpe *in toto*, and she remained Sally Graythorpe.

Miss Graythorpe was, at a guess, about fifteen when her step-father died. Her mother, now for the second time a widow, must have been very comfortably off, as she had an income of her own as well as a life-interest in her late husband's invested savings, which was unfettered by any conditions as to her marrying again, or otherwise. She was not long in availing herself of this liberty ; for about the time when her daughter was of an age to be engaged on her own account, she accepted a third offer of marriage—this time from a clergyman, who, like herself, had already stood by the death-beds of two former mates, and was qualified to sympathise with her in every way, including comfortable inheritances.



But the young Sally Graythorpe kicked furiously against this new arrangement. It was an insult to papa (she referred to Mr. Nightingale ; her real papa was a negligible factor), and she wouldn't live in the same house with that canting old hypocrite. She would go away straight to India, and marry Gerry—he would be glad enough to have her—see how constant the dear good boy had been ! Not a week passed but she got a letter. She asked her mother flatly what could she want to marry again for at her time of life ? And such a withered old sow-thistle as that ! Sub-dean, indeed ! She would *sub-dean* him ! In fact, there were words, and the words almost went the length of taking the form known as “ language ” *par excellence*. The fact is, this Sally and her mother never *did* get on together well ; it wasn't the least like her subsequent relation with our special Sally—Sally number three—who trod on Mr. Fenwick in the Twopenny Tube.

The end of the “ words ” was a letter to Gerry, a liberal trousseau, and a first-class passage out by P. and O. The young lady's luggage for the baggage-room was beautifully stencilled “ Care of Sir Oughtred Penderfield, The Residency, Khopal.” Perfectly safe in his keeping no doubt it would have been. But, then, that might have been true also of luggage if consigned to the Devil. If the tale hinted at in our last chapter *was* true, its poor little headstrong, inexperienced heroine would have been about as safe with the latter.

Anyhow, this club gossip supplies all the broad outline of the story ; and it is a story we need not dwell on. It gives us no means of reconciling the like of the Mrs. Nightingale we know now with the amount of dissimulation, if not treachery, she must have practised on an unsuspecting boy, assuming that she did, as a matter of course, conceal her relation with Penderfield. One timid conjecture we have is, that the girl, having to deal with a subject every accepted phrase relating to which is an equivocation or an hypocrisy, really found it impossible to make her position understood by a lover who simply idolised the ground she trod on. Under such circumstances, she may either have given up the attempt in despair, or jumped too quickly to the conclusion that she had succeeded in communicating the facts, and had been met half-way by forgiveness. Put yourself in her position, and resolve in your mind exactly how you would have gone about it—how you would have got a story of that sort forced into the mind of a welcoming lover ; wedged into the heart of his unsuspecting rapture. Or, if you fancied he understood

you, and no storm of despairing indignation came, think how easy it would be to persuade yourself you had done your duty by the facts, and might let the matter lapse ! Why should not one woman once take advantage of the obscurities of decorum so many a man has found comforting to his soul during confession of sin, when pouring his revelations into an ear whose owner's experience of life has not qualified her to understand them ? Think of the difficulty you yourself have encountered in getting at the absolute facts in some delicate concurrence of circumstances in this connexion, because of the fundamental impossibility of getting anyone, man or woman, to speak direct truth !

Let us find out, or construct, all the excuses we can for poor Miss Graythorpe. Let us imagine the last counsel she had from the only one of her own sex who would be likely to know anything of the matter—the nefarious partner (if the Major's surmise was true) in the crime of her betrayer. “ You are making a fuss about nothing. Men are not so immaculate themselves ; your Gerry is no Joseph ! If he rides the high horse with you, just you ask him what *he* had to say to Potiphar's wife ! Oh, we're not so strait-laced out here—bless us alive !—as we are in England, or pretend to be.” We can fancy the elegant brute saying it.

All our surmises bring us very little light, though. It is not that we are at such a loss to forgive poor Sally Graythorpe as a mere human creature we know nothing about. The difficulty is to reconcile what she seems to have been then with what she is now. We give it up.

Only, we wish to remark that it is her offence against her *fiancé* alone that we find it hard to stomach. As to her relations with Colonel Penderfield, we can say nothing without full particulars. And even if we had them, and they bore hard upon Miss Graythorpe, our mind would go back to the Temple in Jerusalem, and a morning nearly two thousand years ago. The voice that said who was to cast the first stone is heard no more, or has merged in ritual. But the Scribes and Pharisees are with us still, and quite ready to do the pelting. We should be harder on the Colonel, no doubt, with our prejudices ; only, observe ! he isn't brought up for judgment. He never is, any more than the other party was that day in Jerusalem. But then, the Scribes and Pharisees were male ! And they had the courage of their convictions—their previous convictions !—and acted on them in their selection of the culprit.

Without further apology for retailing conjecture as certainty,



the following may be taken as substantially the story of this lady—we do not know whether to call her a divorced or a deserted wife—and her little encumbrance.

She found a resource in her trouble in the person of this old friend of her stepfather Paul Nightingale, Colonel (at that time Major) Lund. This officer had remained on in harness to the unusual age of fifty-eight, but it was a civil appointment he held ; he had retired from active service in the ordinary course of things. It was probably not only because of his old friendship for her stepfather, but because the poor girl told him her unvarnished tale in full and he believed it, that he helped and protected her through the critical period that followed her parting from her husband ; found her a domicile and seclusion, and enlisted on her behalf the sympathies of more than one officer's wife at our Sally's birthplace—Umritsur, if Major Roper was right. He corresponded with her mother as intercessor and mediator, but that good lady was in no mood for mercy : had her daughter not told her that she was too old to think of marriage ? Too old ! And had she not called her venerable sub-dean a withered old sow-thistle ? She could forgive, under guarantees of the sinner's repentance ; for had not her Lord enjoined forgiveness where the bail tendered was sufficient ? Only, so many reservations and qualifications occurred in her interpretations of the Gospel narrative, that forgiveness, diluted out of all knowledge, left its perpetrator free to refuse ever to see its victim again. But she would pray for her. A sub-diaconal application would receive attention ; that was the suggestion between the lines.

The kind-hearted old soldier pooh-poohed her first letters. She would come round in time. Her natural good-feeling would get the better of her when she had had her religious fling. He didn't put it so—a strict old Puritan of the old school—but that was Miss Graythorpe's gloss in her own mind on what he did say. However, her mother never did come round. She cherished her condemnation of her daughter to the end, forgiving her again *moré suo*, if anything with increased asperity, on her death-bed.

This Colonel Lund is (have we mentioned this before ?) the “ old fossil ” whom we have seen at Krakatoa Villa. He was usually called “ the Major ” there, from early association. He continued to foster and shelter his *protégée* during the year following the arrival of our own particular young Sally on the scene, saw her safely through her divorce proceedings, and then,



when he finally retired from his post as deputy-commissioner for the Umritsur district, arranged that she herself, with her encumbrance and an ayah, should accompany him to England. His companion travelled as Mrs. Graythorpe, and Sally junior as Mrs. Graythorpe's baby. She was excessively popular on the voyage; Sally was not suffering from sea-sickness, or feeling apparently the least embarrassed by the recent bar-sinister in her family. She courted Society, seizing it by its whiskers or its curls, and holding on like grim death. She endeavoured successively to get into the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic, but failed in every attempt, and was finally landed at Southampton in safety, after a resolute effort to drag the captain, who was six feet three high and weighed twenty stone, ashore by his beard. She was greatly missed on the remainder of the voyage (to Bremen—the boat was a German boat) by a family of Vons, who fortunately never guessed at the flaw in Sally's extraction, or there's no knowing what might not have happened.

But the arrival was too late for her poor mother to utilise her services towards a reconciliation with her own offended parent. A sudden attack of influenza, followed by low diet on high principles, and uncombated by timely port wine and tonics, had been followed by heart-failure, and the sub-dean was left free to marry again, again. Whether he did so or not doesn't matter to us. The scheme Mrs. Graythorpe had been dwelling on with pleasure through the voyage of simply dropping her offspring on its grandmother, and leaving it to drive a coach and six through the latter's Christian forgiveness, was not to come to pass. She found herself after a year and a half of Oriental life back in her native land, an orphan with a small—but it must be admitted a very charming—illegitimate family. It was hard upon her, for she had been building on the success of this manœuvre, in which she had, perhaps, an unreasonable confidence. If she could only rely on Sally not being inopportunistically sick over mamma just at the critical moment—that was the only misgiving that crossed her mind. Otherwise, such creases and such a hilarious laugh would be too much for starch itself. Poor lady! she had thought to herself more than once, since Sally had begun to mature and consolidate, that if Gerry had only waited a little—just long enough to see what a little duck was going to come of it all—and not lost his temper, all might have been made comfortable, and Sally might have had a little

legitimate half-brother by now. What *had* become—what would become of Gerry ? That she did not know, might never know.

One little pleasant surprise awaited her. It came to her knowledge for the first time that she was sole heir to the estate of her late stepfather, Paul Nightingale. The singular practice that we believe to exist in many families of keeping back all information about testamentary dispositions as long as possible from the persons they concern, especially minors, had been observed in her case ; and her mother, perhaps resenting the idea that her daughter—a young chit !—should presume to outlive her, had kept her in ignorance of the contents of her stepfather's will. It did not really matter much. Had the sum been large, and a certainty, it might have procured for her a safer position when a temporary guest at the Residency at Khopai, or even caused her indignant young bridegroom to think twice before he took steps to rid himself of her. But, after all, it was only some three hundred and fifty pounds a year, and depended on the life of a lady of forty-odd, who might live to be a hundred. A girl with no more than that is nearly as defenceless as she is without it.

A condition was attached to the bequest—not an unwelcome one. She was to take her stepfather's name, Nightingale. She was really very glad to do this. There was a *faux air* of a real married name about Mrs. Nightingale that was lacking in Mrs. Graythorpe. Besides, all troublesome questions about who Sally's father was would get lost sight of in the fact that her mother had changed her name in connexion with that sacred and glorious thing, an inheritance. A trust-fund would always be a splendid red-herring to draw across the path of Mrs. Grundy's sleuth-hounds—a quarry more savoury to their nostrils even than a reputation. And nothing soothes the sceptical more than being asked now and again to witness a transfer of stock, especially if it is money held in trust. It has all the force of a pleasant alterative pill on the circulation of "Respectability"—removes obstructions and promotes appetite—is a certain remedy for sleeplessness, and so forth. So though there wasn't a particle of reason why Mrs. Nightingale's money should be held by anyone but herself, as she had no intention whatever of marrying, Colonel Lund consented to become her trustee ; and both felt that something truly respectable had been done—something that if it didn't establish a birthright and a correct extraction for Miss Sally, at any rate went a long way towards it.



By the time Mrs. Nightingale had got settled in the little house at Shepherd's Bush, that she took on a twenty-one years' lease five or six years after her return to England, and had christened it Saratoga, after her early recollection of the place where she first saw her stepfather, whose name she took when she came into the money he left her—by this time she, with the assistance of Colonel Lund, had quite assumed the appearance of a rather comfortably off young widow-lady, who did not make a great parade of her widowhood, but whose circumstances seemed reasonable enough, and challenged no inquiry. Inquisitiveness would have seemed needless impertinence—just as much so as yours would have been in the case of the hypothetical So-and-so's at the beginning of our last chapter. A vague impression got in the air that Sally's father had not been altogether satisfactory—well, wasn't it true? It may have leaked out from something in "the Major's" manner. But it never produced any effect on friends, except that they saw in it a reason why Mrs. Nightingale never mentioned her husband. He had been a black sheep. Silence about him showed good feeling on her part. *De mortuis*, etc. . . .

Of one thing we feel quite certain—that if, at the time we made this lady's acquaintance, any chance friend of hers or her daughter's—say, for instance, Lætitia Wilson, Sally's old school-friend and present music-colleague—had been told that Mrs. Nightingale, of Krakatoa Villa, No. 7, Glenmoira Road, Shepherd's Bush, W., had been the heroine of divorce proceedings under queer circumstances, that her husband wasn't dead at all, and that that dear little puss Sally was Goodness-knows-who's child, we feel certain that the information would have been cross-countered with a blank stare of incredulity. Why, the mere fact that Mrs. Nightingale had refused so many offers of marriage was surely sufficient to refute such a nonsensical idea! Who ever heard of a lady with a soiled record refusing a good offer of marriage?

But while we are showing our respect for what the man in the street says or thinks, and the woman in the street thinks and says, are we not losing sight of a leading phrase of the symphony, sonata, cantata—whatever you like to call it—of Mrs. Nightingale's life? A phrase that steals in, just audibly—no more, in the most *strepitoso* passage of the stormy second movement—a movement, however, in which the proceedings of the Divorce Court are scarcely more audible, *pianissimo legato*, a chorus with closed



lips, all the stringed instruments *sordini*. But it grows and grows, and is *allegro con fuoco* on the voyage home, and only leaves a bar or two blank, when the thing it metaphorically represents is asleep and isn't suffering from the wind. It breaks out again *vivacissimo accelerando* when Miss Sally (whom we allude to) wakes up, and doesn't appreciate Nestlé's milk. But it always grows, and in due course may be said to become the music itself.

More intelligibly, Mrs. Nightingale became so wrapped up in her baby, that had seemed to her at first a cruel embarrassment—a thing to be concealed and ignored—that very soon she really had no time to think about where she broke her molasses-jug, as Uncle Remus says. The new life that it had become hers to guard took her out of herself, made her quite another being from the reckless and thoughtless girl of two years ago.

As time went on she felt more and more the value of the new-comer's indifference to her extraction and the tragedy that had attended it. A living creature, with a stupendous capacity for ignoring the past, and, indeed, everything except a monotonous diet, naturally gave her mind a bias towards the future, and hope grew in her heart unconsciously, without reminding her that it might have been despair. A bad alarm, when the creature was six months old, that an enteric attack might end fatally, had revealed to its mother how completely it had taken possession of her own life, and what a power for compensation there was even in its most imperious and tyrannical habits. As it gradually became articulate—however unreasonable it continued—her interest in its future extinguished her memories of her own past, and she found herself devising games for baby before the little character was old enough to play them, and costumes before she was big enough to wear them. By the time Saratoga Villa had become Krakatoa, Miss Sally had had time to benefit by a reasonable allowance of the many schemes her mother had developed for her during her infancy. Had all the projects which were mooted for her further education at this date been successfully carried out, she would have been an admirable female Crichton, if her reason had survived the curriculum. Luckily for her, she had a happy faculty for being plucked at examinations, and her education was consequently kept within reasonable bounds.

There was, however, one department of culture in which Sally outshot all competitors. This was swimming. She would give

a bath's length at the Paddington Baths to the next strongest swimmer in the Ladies' Club, and come in triumphant in a race of ten lengths. It was a grand sight to see Sally rushing stem on, cleaving the water with her head almost as if breath were an affectation, and doubling back at the end while the other starters were scarcely half-way. Or shooting through the air in her little blue costume straight for the deepest water, and then making believe to be a fish on the shiny tiles at the bottom.

Her mother always said she was certain that if that little monkey had managed to wriggle through some hole into the sea, on her voyage home, she would have swum after the ship and climbed up the rudder chains. Possibly, but she was only twelve months old! If, however, she had met with an early death, her mother's lot would have lacked its redemption. The joint life of the two supplies a possible answer to the conundrum that has puzzled us. For in a certain sense the absorption of her own existence in that of another than herself had made of Rosalind the woman, at the date of our introduction to her, quite another person from Rosalind the hot-headed and thoughtless girl that had quarrelled with her natural guardian for doing what she had a perfect right to do, and had steered alone into unknown seas, a ship without a rudder or a compass, and very little knowledge of the stars of heaven for her guide. We can see what she is now much better than we can judge what she was then.

It need not be supposed that this poor lady never felt any interest, never made any enquiry, about the sequel of the life she had so completely *bouleversé*; for, whatever blame we feel bound to express, or whatever exculpation we contrive to concoct for her, there can be no doubt what the result was to the young man who has come into the story, so far, only under the name of Gerry. We simply record his designation as it has reached us in the data we are now making use of. It is all hearsay about a past. We add what we have been able to gather, merely noting that what it seems to point to recommends itself to us as probable.

"Nobody knoo, nobody cared," was our friend Major Roper's brief reply to an enquiry what became of this young man. "Why, good Lard, sir!" he went on, "if one was to begin fussin' about all the Johnnies that shy off when there's a row of that sort, one would never get a dam night's rest! Not but what if I



could recollect his name. Now, what *was* his confounded name ? Thought I'd got it—but no—it wasn't Messiter. Fancy his Christian name was Jeremiah.... I recollect Messiter I'm thinkin' of—character that looked as if he had a pain in his stomach—came into forty thousand pounds. Stop a bit—was it Indermaur ? No, it wasn't Indermaur. No use guessin'—give it up."

Besides, the Major was getting purple with suppressed coughing. When he had given it up, he surrendered unconditionally to the cough, but was presently anxious to transmit, through its subsidence, an idea that he found it impossible to shake across the table between us out of an inarticulate forefinger end. It assumed form in time. Why not ask the lady herself ? We demurred, and the old soldier explained.

"Not rushin' at her, you know, and sayin', 'Who the dooce was it married you, ma'am ?' I'm not a dam fool. Showin' tact, you know—puttin' it easy and accidental. 'Who was that young beggar now ?—inspector—surveyor—something of the sort—up at Umballa in seventy-nine ? Burrumpooter Irrigation—that's what *he* was on.' And, Lard bless you, my dear sir, you don't suppose she'll up and say, 'I suppose you mean that dam husband of mine.' Not she ! Sensible woman that, sir—seen the world—knows a thing or two. You'll see she'll only say, 'That was Foodle or Parker or Stebbins or Jephson,' as may be, accordin' to the name."

We did not see our way to this enterprise, and said so. We drew a line ; said there were things you could do, and things you couldn't do. The Major chuckled, and admitted this might be so ; his old governor used to say, "Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines." The last two words remained behind in the cough, unless, indeed, they were shaken out off the Major's forefinger into a squeezed lemon that was awaiting its Seltzer.

"But I can tell you one thing, Mr.," said he, forgetting our name, as soon as he felt soothed by the lemon-squash. "He didn't keep his name, that young man didn't. You may bet he didn't safely ! Only, it's no use askin' me why, nor what he changed it to. If it *was* him that was lost in the Bush in New South Wales, when I was at Sydney, why, of course that chap's *name* was the same. I remember that much. Can't get hold of the name, though." He appeared to consult the pattern on his silk pocket-handkerchief as an oracle, and to await its answer with a thought-



ful eye. Presently he blew his nose on the oracle, and returned it to his pocket, adding : " But it's a speculation—little speculation of my own. Don't *ask me* !" We saw, however, that more would come, without asking. And it came.

" It made a talk out there at the time. But *that* didn't bring him to life. You may talk till you're hoarse, but you won't bring a dead man to—not when he's twenty miles off in a forest of gum-trees, as like as tallow-candles. . . . Oh yes, they had the natives put on the scent—black trackers, they call 'em—but, Lard ! it was all no use. They only followed the scent of his horse, and the horse came back a fortnight after with them on his heels, an hour or so behind. . . . He'd only just left his party a moment, and meant to come back into the open. I suppose he thought he was sure to cross a cutting, and got trapped in the solid woodland."

" But what was the speculation ? You said just now . . ."

" Not much to go by," said the Major, shaking a discouraging head. " Another joker with another name, who turned up a hundred miles off ! Harrisson, I fancy—yes, Harrisson. It was only my idea they were the same. I came away, and don't know how they settled it."

" But something, Major Roper, must have made you think this man the same—the same as Jeremiah Indermaur, or whatever his name was—Mrs. Nightingale's man ?"

" Somethin' must ! What it was is another pair of shoes." He cogitated and reflected, but seemed to get no nearer. " You ask Pelloo," he said. " He might give you a tip." Then he called for a small glass of cognac, because the Seltzer was such dam chilly stuff, and the dry sherry was no use at all. We left him arranging the oracle over his face, with a view to a serious nap.

We got a few words shortly after with General Pellew, who seemed a little surprised at the Major's having referred to him for information.

" I don't know," said he, " why our friend Roper shouldn't recollect as much about it as I do. However, I do certainly remember that when this young gentleman, whatever his name was, left the station, he did go to Sydney or Melbourne, and I have some hazy recollection of some one saying that he was lost in the Bush. But why old Jack fancies he was found again or changed his name to Harrisson I haven't the slightest idea."

So that all we ourselves succeeded in getting at about Gerry

may be said to have been the trap-door he vanished through. Whether Mrs. Nightingale got at other sources of information we cannot say. Whatever she learned she would be sure to keep her own counsel about. She may have concluded that the bones of the husband who had in a fit of anger deserted her had been picked by white ants, twenty years ago, in an Australian forest ; or she may have come to know, by some means, of his resuscitation from the Bush, and his successes or failures in a later life elsewhere. We have had our own reasons for doubting that she ever knew that he took the name of Harrisson—if he really did—a point which seemed to us very uncertain, so far as the Major's narrative went. If she did get a scrap of tidings, a flying word, about him now and again, it was most likely all she got. And when she got it she would feel the danger of further enquiry—the difficulty of laying the reasons for her curiosity before her informant. You can't easily say to a stranger : “ Oh, do tell us about Mrs. Jones or Mr. Smith. She or he is our divorced or separated wife or husband.” A German might, but Mrs. Nightingale was not a German.

However, she *may* have heard something about that Gerry, we grant you, in all those twenty long years. But if you ask us our opinion—our private opinion—it is that she scarcely heard of him, if she heard at all, and certainly never set eyes on him, until one day her madcap little daughter brought him home, half killed by an electric shock, in a cab we were at some pains to describe accurately a few pages ago. And even then, had it not been for the individualities of that cab, she might have missed seeing him, and let him go away to the infirmary or the police-station, and probably never been near him again.

As it was, the face she saw when a freak of chance led to her following that cab, and looking in out of mere curiosity at its occupant, was the face of her old lover—of her husband. Eighteen—twenty—years had made a man of one who was then little more than a boy. The mark of the world he had lived in was on him ; and it was the mark of a rough, strong world where one fights, and, if one is a man of his sort, maybe wins. But she never doubted his identity for a moment. And the way in which she grasped the situation—above all, the fact that he had not recognised her and would not recognise her—quite justified, to our thinking, Major Roper's opinion of her powers of self-command.

Nevertheless, these were not so absolute that her demeanour escaped comment from the cabby, the only witness of her first sight of the "electrocuted" man. He spoke of her afterwards as that squealing party down that sanguinary little turning off Shepherd's Bush Road he took that sanguinary galvanic shock to.



## CHAPTER IX

Two parts in a sestet, played alone, may be a maddening torture to a person whose musical imagination is not equal to supplying the other four. Perhaps you have heard Haydn, Op. 1704, and rejoiced in the logical consecutiveness of its fugues, the indisputableness of its well-classified statements, the swift pertinence of the repartees of the first violin to the second, the apt *résumé* and orderly reorganisation of their epigrammatic interchanges by the 'cello and the double-bass, the steady typewritten report and summary of the whole by the pianoforte, and the regretful exception to so many points taken by the clarionet. If so, you have no doubt felt, as we have, a sense of perfect satisfaction at faultless musical structure, without having to surrender your soul unconditionally to the passionate appeal of a Beethoven, or to split your musical brains in conjectures about what Volkankoffsky is driving at. You will find at the end that you have passed an hour or so of tranquil enjoyment, and are mighty content with yourself, the performers, and every one else.

But if you only hear the two parts, played alone, and your mental image of all the other parts is not strong enough to prevent your hearing the two performers count the bars while the non-performers don't do anything at all, you will probably go away and come back presently, or go mad.

Nobody else was there when Sally and Lætitia Wilson were counting four, and beginning too soon, and having to go back and begin all over again, and missing a bar, and knocking down their music-stands when they had to turn over quick. So nobody went mad. Mamma had gone to an anti-vaccination meeting, and Athena had gone to stay over Bank Holiday at Leighton Buzzard, and the boys had gone to skate, and papa was in his study and didn't matter, and they had the drawing-room to themselves. Oh dear, how very often they did count four, to be sure !

Sally was *distracted*, and wasn't paying proper attention to the music. Whenever a string had to be tightened by either, Sally introduced foreign matter. Lætitia was firm and stern (she was twenty-four, if you please !), and wouldn't respond. As thus, in a tightening-up pause :

"I like him awfully, you know, Tishy. In fact, I love him. It's a pleasure to hear him come into the house. Only—one's *mother*, you know ! It's the *oddity* of it !"

"Yes, dear. *Now*, are you ready ? . . . It only clickets down because you will *not* screw in ; it's no use turning and leaving the key sloppy. . . ."

"I know, Tishy dear—teach your granny ! There, I think that's right now. But it *is* funny when it's one's mother, isn't it ?"

"One—two—three—four ! There—you didn't begin ! Remember, you've got to begin on the demisemiquaver at the end of the bar—only not too staccato, remember—and allow for the pause. Now—one, two, three, four, and you begin—in the *middle* of four—*not* the end. Oh dear ! Now once more . . ." etc.

You will at once see from this that Sally had lost no time in finding a confidante for the fossil's communication.

An hour and a half of resolute practising makes you not at all sorry for an oasis in the counting, which you inaugurate (or whatever you do when it's an oasis) by smashing the top coal and making a great blaze. And then you go ever so close, and can talk.

"Are you sure it isn't Colonel Lund's mistake ? Old gentlemen get very fanciful." Thus Miss Wilson. But it seems Sally hasn't much doubt. Rather the other way round, if anything !

"I thought it might be, all the way to Norland Square. Then I changed my mind coming up the hill. Of course, I don't know about mamma till I ask her. But I expect the Major's right about Mr. Fenwick."

"But how does *he* know ? How do you know ?"

"I don't know." Sally tastes the points of a holly-leaf with her tongue-tip, discreetly, to see how sharp they are, and cogitates. "At least," she continues, "I *do* know. He never takes his eyes off mamma from the minute he comes into the house."

"Oh !"

"Besides—lots of things ! Oh no ; as far as that goes, I should say *he* was spooney."

"I see. You're a vulgar child, all the same! But about your mother—that's the point."

The vulgar child cogitates still more gravely.

"I should say *now*," she says, after thinking it over, "that—only I never noticed it at the time, you know——"

"That what?"

"That mamma knows Mr. Fenwick is spooney, and looks up at times to see that he's going on."

Lætitia seems to receive this idea with some hesitation or reserve. "Looks up at times to see if he's going on?" she repeats enquiringly.

"Yes, of course—like we should. Only I didn't say 'see if.' I said 'see that.' It makes all the difference."

Miss Wilson breaks into a laugh. "And there you are all the time looking as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, and as grave as a judge."

Sally has to acquiesce in being kissed by her friend at this point; but she curls up a little as one who protests against being patronised. "We-e-e-ell!" she says, lengthening out the word, "why not? I don't see anything in *that*!"

"Oh no, dear—*that's* all right! Why shouldn't it be?"

But this isn't candid of Lætitia, whose speech and kiss had certainly appeared to impute suppressed insight, or penetration, or sly-pussness, or something of that sort to her young friend. But with an implied claim to rights of insight, on her own account, from seniority. Sally is *froissée* at this, but not beyond jerking the topic into a new light.

"Of course, it's their being grown up that makes one stare so. If it wasn't for that..." But this gives away her case, surrenders all claim to her equality with Lætitia's twenty-four years. The advantage is caught at meanly.

"That's only because you're a baby, dear. Wait till you're ten years older, and thirty-eight won't seem so old. I suppose your mother's about that?"

"Mother? Why, she's nearly thirty-nine!"

"And Mr. Fenwick?"

"Oh, *he's* forty-one. *Quite!* Because we talked it all over, and made out they were over eighty between them."

"Who talked it over?"

"Why, him and her and me, of course. Last night."

"Who did you have, Sally dear?"

"Only ourselves, and Dr. Prosy and his Goody mother."



"I thought Mr. Fenwick——"

"I counted him in with us—mother and me and the Major."

"Oh, you counted him in?"

"Why shouldn't I count him in, if I like?"

"Why not? And you do like?" There is an appearance of irritating sagacity about Sally's friend. "What did Dr. Vereker say, Sally dear?"

"Doc-tor Vereker! Dr. Prosy. Prosy's not a referee—it was no concern of his! Besides—they'd gone."

"Who'd gone?"

"Dr. Prosy and his old hen of a mother. Well, Tishy dear, she is like that. Comes wobbling down on you as if you were a chicken! I hope you don't think mother and I and Mr. Fenwick would talk about how old we were added together, with old Goody Prosy in it!"

"Of course not, dear!"

"Oh, Tishy dear, how aggravating you are! Now do please don't be penetrating. You know you're trying to get at something; and there's nothing to get at. It was perfectly natural. Only, of course, we should never dream of talking about how old before people and their gossipy old mothers."

"Of course not, dear!"

"There, now! You're being imperturbable! I knew you would. But you may say what you like—there really was nothing in it. Nothing whatever that time! However, of course mother does like Mr. Fenwick very much—everybody knows that."

Lætitia says time will show, and Sally says, "Show what?" For the remark connects itself with nothing in the conversation. Its maker does not reply, but retires into the fastnesses of a higher philosophy, unknown to the teens, but somehow attainable in the early twenties. She comes down, however, to ask after Dr. Vereker. Sally has as good as held her tongue about him. Have they quarrelled?"

"My dear Tishy! The idea! A *perfect stranger*!"

"I thought you were such good friends."

"I've nothing against Dr. Vereker. But fancy quarrelling with him! Like bosom friends. Kissing and making it up. What next!" Lætitia seems to have discovered that Sally, subjected to a fixed amused look, is sure to develope, and maintains one; and Sally follows on:

"One has to be on an intimate footing to fall out. Besides,

people shouldn't be hens' sons. Not if they expect that sort of thing !”

“ Which sort ?”

“ You know perfectly well, Tishy dear ! And they shouldn't be worthy, either, people shouldn't. I'm not at all sure it isn't his worthiness, just as much as his mother. I *could* swallow his mother, if it came to that !”

Lætitia, without relaxing the magnetism of her look, is replacing a defective string. But a stimulating word will keep Sally up to the mark. It would be a pity she should die down, having got so far.

“ Not at all sure *what* isn't his worthiness !”

“ Now, Tishy dear, what nonsense ! As if you didn't understand ! You may just as well be penetrating outright, if you're going to go on like that. All I know is that, worthiness or no, if Dr. Vereker expects I'm going to put him on a quarrelling footing, he's mistaken, and the sooner he gives up the idea the better. I suppose he'll be wanting me to cherish him next.”

And then what does that irritating Lætitia Wilson do but say suddenly, “ I'm quite ready for the scherzo, dear, if you are.” Just as if Sally had been talking all this for her own private satisfaction and amusement ! And she knew perfectly well, Lætitia did, that she had been eliciting, and that she meant to wait a day or two, and begin again ever so far on, and make believe Sally had said heaps of things. And Sally had really said nothing—*nothing* !

However, Miss Wilson was certainly a very fine violin figure, and really striking in long sostenuto notes, with a fine throat and handsome fingers on her left hand with broad bones, and a handsome wrist on her bowing-arm where it was wanted. Only now, of course, she hadn't got her Egyptian bracelet that looked so well, and her hair wasn't done in a coronet, but only just twisted up anyhow. Besides, when it's a difficult scherzo and you take it quick, your appearance of having the concentration of Bonaparte and Julius Cæsar, and the alacrity of a wild cat, doesn't bring out your good points. Give us an *andante maestoso* movement, or a *diminuendo rallentando* that reaches the very climax and acme of slowness itself just before the applause comes ! It was rather as a meditation in contrasts, though, that Sally thought thus to herself ; for detached musical jerks of diabolical rapidity, that have to be snapped at with the punctuality of the mosquito slayer, don't show your rounded lines

to advantage, and make you clench your teeth and glare horribly.

Our story is like the scherzo in one respect : it has to be given in detached jerks—literary, not musical—and these jerks don't come at any stated intervals at all. The music was bad enough—so Sally and Lætitia thought—but the chronicle is more spasmodic still. However, if you want to know its remaining particulars, you will have to brace yourself up to tolerating an intermittent style. It is the only one our means of collecting information admits of.

This little musical interlude, and the accidental chat of our two young performers, gives us a kind of idea of what was the position of things at Krakatoa Villa six months after Fenwick made his singular reappearance in the life of Mrs. Nightingale. We shall rely on your drawing all our inferences. There is only one belief of ours we need to lay stress upon ; it is that the lady's scheme to do all she could to recapture and hold this man who had been her husband was no mere slow suggestion of the course of events in that six months, but a swift and decisive resolution—one that, if not absolutely made at once, paused only in the making until she was quite satisfied that the disappearance of Fenwick's past was an accomplished fact. Once satisfied of that, he became to her simply the man she had loved twenty years ago—the man who did not, could not, forgive her what seemed so atrocious a wrong, but whom she could forgive the unforgiveness of ; and this all the more if she had come to know of the ruinous effect her betrayal of him had had—must have had—upon his after-life. He was this man—this very man—to all appearance with a mysterious veil drawn, perhaps for ever, over the terrible close of their brief linked life and its hideous cause—over all that she would have asked and prayed should be forgotten. If only this oblivion could be maintained!—that was her fear. If it could, what task could be sweeter to her than to make him such amends as lay in her power for the wrong she had done him—how faultfully, who shall say ? And if, in late old age, no dawn of memory having gleamed in his ruined mind, she came to be able to speak to him and tell him his own story—the tale of the wreck of his early years—would not that almost, *almost*, carry with it a kind of compensation for what she had undergone ?

But her terror of seeing a return of memory now was a haunting



nightmare to her. She could only soothe and alleviate her anxiety by suggesting efforts at recollection to Fenwick, and observing with concealed satisfaction how utterly useless they all were. She felt guilty at heart in being so happy at his ill-success, and had to practise an excusable hypocrisy, an affectation of disappointment at his repeated failures. On one particular occasion a shudder of apprehension passed through her; she thought he had got a clue. If he did, what was to prevent his following it up? She found it hard to say to him how sorry she was this clue led to nothing, and to forecast from it encouragement for the future. But she said to herself after that, that she was a good actress, and had played her part well. The part was a hard one.

For what came about was this. It chanced one evening, some three months after the railway adventure, when Fenwick had become an accepted and constant visitor at Krakatoa Villa, that as he took a very late leave of Sally and her mother, the latter came out with him into the always quiet road, while Sally ran back into the house to direct a letter he was to post, but which had been forgotten for the moment, just as he was departing.

They had talked a great deal, and with a closer familiarity than ever before, of the problem of Fenwick's oblivion. Both ladies had gone on the lines of suggesting clues, trying to recall to him the things that *must* have been in his life as in others. How about his parents? Well, he remembered that, as a fact, he had a father and mother. It was *themselves* he could not recollect. How about his schooldays? No, that was a blank. He could not even remember having been flogged. Yet the idea of school was not unfamiliar; how, otherwise, could he laugh as he did at the absurdity of forgetting all about it, especially being flogged? But his brothers, his sisters, how *could* he forget *them*? He *did*, although in their case, as in that of his parents, he somehow knew that some definite identities had existed that he had forgotten. But any effort to recall any specific person came to nothing, or else he only succeeded in reviving images manifestly confused with characters in fiction or history. Then Sally, who was rather incredulous about this complete vacuity of mind, had said to him: "But come now, Mr. Fenwick, you don't mean to say you don't know if you ever had a sweetheart?" And he had replied with a laugh: "My dear Miss Sally, I'm sure I must have had plenty of sweethearts. Perhaps it's because I had so many that I have

forgotten them all—all—all ! They are all gone with the rest. I can do sums, and can speak French, but what school I learned to keep accounts at I can't tell you ; and as to where I lived (as I must have done) among French people to speak French, I can tell no more than Adam." And then he had become rather reserved and silent till he got up to go, and they had not liked to press him for more. The pained look they had often been distressed to see came on his face, and he pressed his fingers on his eyelids as though shutting out the present world might help him to recall the past ; then with a rough head-shake of his thick hair, like a big dog, and a brushing of it about with both hands, as though he would rouse this useless head of his to some sort of action, he put the whole thing aside, and talked of other matters till he left the house.

But when he and Mrs. Nightingale found themselves alone in the road, enjoying the delicious west wind that meant before the morning to become an equinoctial gale, and blow down chimney-pots and sink ships, he turned to her and went back to what they had been talking of. She could see the fine strong markings of his face in the moonlight, the great jaw and firm lips, the handsome nose damaged by a scar that lay true across the bridge of it, and looked white in the gleam of the moon, the sad large eyelids and the grave eyes that had retaken the look he had shaken off. She could note and measure every change maturity had stamped upon him, and could see behind it the boy that had come to meet her at the station at Umballa twenty years before—had met her full of hope, met her to claim his reward after the long delay through the hideous days of the pestilence, to inaugurate the anticipated hours of happiness he had trembled to dream of. And the worst of the cholera wards that had filled the last months of his life with horror had held nothing for him so bad as the tale she had to tell or conceal. She could see back upon it all as they stood there in the moonlight. Do not say she was not a strong woman.

"Do you know, Mrs. Nightingale," Fenwick said, "it's always a night of this sort that brings back one's youth ? You know what I mean ?"

"I think I understand what you mean, Mr. Fenwick. You mean if"—she hesitated a moment—"if you *could* recollect."

He nodded a complete yes.

"Just that," said he. "I don't know if it's the millions of dry leaves sweeping about, or the moon scudding so quick



through the clouds, or the smell of the Atlantic, or the bark coming off the plane-trees, or the wind blowing the roads into smooth dust-drifts and hard clear-ups you could eat your dinner off—I don't know what it is, but something or another on a night of this sort does always seem to bring old times back, when, as you say, they can be got back on any terms." He half-laughed, not in earnest. She found something to say, also not very much in earnest.

"Because we remember nights of the sort when we were small, and that brings them back."

"Come, I say now, Mrs. Nightingale! As if we couldn't remember all sorts of nights, and nothing comes back about them. It's this particular sort of night does the job."

"Did you think you remembered something, Mr. Fenwick?" There was anxiety in her voice, but no need to conceal it. It would as readily pass muster for anxiety that he *should* have remembered something as that he *shouldn't*.

"I can hardly go so far as that. But that joke of your little pussycat about the sweethearts got mixed with the smell of the wind and the chrysanthemums and dahlias and sunflowers." He pressed his fingers hard on his eyes again. "Do you know, there's pain in it—worse than you'd think! The half-idea that comes is not painful in itself—rather the contrary—but it gives my brain a twist at the point at which I can recall no more. Yes, it's painful!"

"But there *was* a half-idea? Forgive me if it gives you pain, and don't try. Only I'm not sure you ought not to try when the chance comes, for your own sake."

"Oh, I don't mind trying. This time it was something about a front garden and a girl and a dog-cart." He had not taken his hands from his eyes. Now he did so, brushing them on his hair and forehead as before. "I get no nearer," said he.

"A front garden and a girl and a dog-cart"—thus Miss Sally saucily, coming out with the letter. "Did you have a very touching parting, Mr. Fenwick? Now, mind you don't forget to post it. I wouldn't trust you!" He took the letter from her, but seemed too *distracted* to notice her little piece of levity; then, still speaking as if in distress or pain, he said:

"It must have been some front garden, long ago. This one brought it back—this and the leaves. Only there was nothing for the dog-cart."

"And only mamma for the girl!"—thus Sally the irrepressible.



And then mamma laughed, but not Mr. Fenwick at all. Only Sally thought her mother's laugh came hard, and said to herself, now she should catch it for chaffing! However, she didn't catch it, although the abruptness with which her mother said good-night and went back into the house half confirmed her impression that she should.

On the contrary, when she followed her a few minutes later, having accompanied Fenwick to near the road end, and scampered back to the house, turning to throw Parthian good-nights after him, she found her mother pale and thoughtful, and surely the lips and hands she used to kiss her with were cold. She wasn't even sure that wasn't a tear. Perhaps it was.

For mamma had had a bad ten minutes—scarcely a *mauvais quart d'heure*—and even that short interim had given her time to see that this kind of thing would be incessant with her recovered husband, granting that she could recover him. Only of that she felt nearly secure—unaccountably, perhaps; certainly not warrantably. But how to bear this kind of thing through a life?—that was the question.

What was this kind of thing, this bad ten minutes, that had made her tremble, and turn white, and glad to get away, and be alone a minute before Sally came up jubilant? But oh, how glad, for all that, to get at her daughter's lips to kiss!—only not too hard, so as to suggest reflection and analysis.

What had upset Mrs. Nightingale was a counter-memory of twenty years ago, a clear and full and vivid recollection of the garden and the girl and the dog-cart. And then also there "had only been mamma for the girl." But oh, the relation the lassie who said those words bore to those past days, her place in the drama that filled them out! Little wonder her mother's brain reeled.

She could see it all vividly now, all over again. A glorious night like this; a dazzling full moon sailing in the blue beyond the tumbled chaos of loose cloud so near the earth; the riot of the wind-swept trees fighting to keep a shred of their old green on their bareness, making new concessions to the blast, and beating their stripped limbs together in their despair; the endless swirl of leaves at liberty, free now at last to enjoy a short and merry life before becoming food for worms. She could see the face she had just parted from, but twenty years younger—the same bone-structure with its unscarred youth upon it, only a lesser beard with a sunnier tinge, but all the thickness of the

hair. She could remember the voices in the house, the farewells to the young man who was just starting for India, and how she slipped down to say a last good-bye on her own account, and felt grateful to that old Dean Ireson (the only time in her life) for begging her mother (who, of course, was the Rosalind Nightingale Fenwick spoke of in the train) on no account to expose herself to the night-air. Why, she might have come down, too, into the garden, and spoiled it all! And then she could remember—oh, how well!—their last words in the windy garden, and the horse in the dog-cart, fresh from his stall, and officiously anxious to catch the train—as good as saying so, with flings and stamps. And how little she cared if the groom *did* hear him call her Rosey, for that was his name for her.

“Now, Gerry, remember, I’ve made you *no* promises; but I’ll play fair. If I change my mind, I’ll write and tell you. And you may write to me.”

“Every day?”

“Silly boy, be reasonable! Once a month! You’ll see, you’ll get tired of it.”

“Come, Rosey, I say! The idea!”

“Yes, you will! Now go! You’ll lose the train.”

“Oh, Rosey dearest!”

“Yes, what?—you’ll lose the train.”

“Oh, my dearest, I *can’t*! Just think—I may never see you again!”

“You *must* go, Gerry dear! And there’s that blockhead of a boy outside there.”

“Never mind him; he’s nobody! Only one more. . . . Yes, *dearest love*, I’m really going. . . . Good-bye! good-bye! God bless you!”

And then how she stood there with the memory of his lips dying on hers, alone by the gate, in the wild wind, and heard the sharp regular trot of the horse lessen on the hard road and die away, and then the running of a train she thought was his, and how he would surely miss it, and have to come back. And it *would* be nice just to see him again! But he was gone, for all that, and he was a dear good boy. And she recollected going to her bedroom to do up her hair, which had all come down, and hiding her face on her pillow in a big burst of tears.

Her mind harked back on all this as he himself, the same but changed, stood there in the moonlight striving to recollect it all, and mysteriously failing. But at least, he *did* fail, and that

was something. But oh, what a wrench it gave to life, thought, reason, to all her heart and being, to have that unconscious chit cut in with "only mamma for the girl!" What and whence was this little malaprop? Her overwrought mind shut away this question—almost in the asking it—with "Dearer to me, at least, than anything else in this world, unless——" and then shut away the rest of the answer.

But she was glad to get at Sally, and feel her there, though she could not speak freely to her—nor, indeed, speak at all. And as soon as the tension died down, she went back as to a source of peace to the failure of his powers of memory, obvious, complete. All her hopes lay in that. Where would they be if the whole past were suddenly sprung on him? He *might* be ready to bury bygones, but——

She woke next day fairly at ease in her mind, but feeling as one does after any near-run escape. And then it was she said to herself that she was a good actress. But the part *was* hard to act.

The relations between Fenwick and the Nightingales, mother and daughter, seem to us to have been acquiring cohesion at the time of the foregoing interview. It is rather difficult to say why. But it serves to pave the way to the state of things that Sally accepted as the "spooneyness" of Fenwick, and her mother's observation of his "going on," without the dimmest idea of the underlying motives of the drama. Another three months, bringing us on to these discriminations of Sally's, may also have brought about appearances that justified them.



## CHAPTER X

WE defy the acutest of psychologists to estimate precisely the hold love has on a man who is diagnosed, in the language of the vulgar child Sally, as "spooney." Probably no patient has ever succeeded in doing this himself. It is quite another matter when the eruption has broken out, when the crater is vomiting flames and the lava is pouring down on the little homesteads at the mountain's base, that may stand in the metaphor for all that man's duties and obligations. By that time he *knows*. But, while still within the "spooney" zone, he knows no more than you or I (or that most important *she*) what the morrow means to bring. Will it be a step on or a step back? An altogether new *she*, or the fires of the volcano, let loose beyond recall?

Fenwick was certainly not in a position to gauge his own feelings towards Mrs. Nightingale. All previous experience was cut away from him, or seemed so. He might have been, for anything he knew, a married man with a family, a devoted husband. He might have been recently wedded to an adoring bride, and she might now be heart-broken in her loneliness. How could he tell? The only thing that gave him courage about this was that he *could* remember the fact that he had had parents, brothers, sisters. He could not recollect *anything whatever* about sweetheart, wife, or child. Unearthly gusts of half-ideas came to him at times, like that of the girl and the dog-cart. But they only gave him pain, and went away unsolved, leaving him sick and dizzy.

His situation was an acutely distressing one. He was shackled and embarrassed, so to speak, by what he knew of his relations to existence. At any moment a past might be sprung on him, bringing him suddenly face to face with God knows what. So strongly did he feel this that he often said to himself that the greatest boon that could be granted to him would be an assurance of continued oblivion. He was especially afflicted by

memories of an atrocious clearness that would come to him in dreams, the horror of which would remain on into his waking time. They were not necessarily horrible things at all, but their clearness in the dream, and their total, if slow, disappearance as the actual world came back, became sometimes an excruciating torment. Who could say that they, or some equivalents, might not reach him out of the past to-day or to-morrow—any time?

For instance, he had one morning waked up in a perfect agony—a cold perspiration as of the worst nightmares—because of a dream harmless enough in itself. He had suddenly remembered, in the dream-street he could identify the houses of so plainly, a first-floor he had occupied where he had left all his furniture locked up years ago. And he had found the house and the first-floor quite easily, and had not seen anything strange in the landlord saying that he and his old woman often wondered when Mr. Fenwick would come for his things. It was not the accumulation of rent unpaid, nor that of the dirt he knew he should find on the furniture (all of which he could recollect in the dream perfectly well), but the fact that he had forgotten it all, and left it unclaimed all those years, that excruciated him. Even his having to negotiate for its removal in his shirt did not afflict him so much as his forgetfulness for so long of the actual furniture; his conviction of the reality of which lasted on after his discovery about his costume had made him suspect, in his dream, that he was dreaming.

To a man whose memory is sound, who feels sure he looks back on an actual past in security, such a dream is only a curiosity of sleep. To Fenwick it was, like many others of the same sort, a possible herald of an analogous revelation in waking hours, with a sequel of dreadful verification from some abyss of an utterly forgotten past.

His worst terror, far and away, was the fear that he was married and a father. It might have been supposed that this arose from a provisional sense of pity for the wife and children he must have left; that his mind would conceive hypothetical poverty for them, or sorrow, disease, or death, the result direct or indirect of his disappearance. But this was scarcely the case. They themselves were too intensely hypothetical. In this respect the blank in his intellect was so unqualified that it might never have occurred to him to ask himself the question if they existed had it not been suggested to him by Mrs. Nightingale herself. It was, in fact, a question she almost always

recurred to when Miss Sally was out of the way. It was no use trying to talk seriously when that little monkey was there. She turned everything to a joke. But the Major was quite another thing. He would back her up in anything reasonable.

"I wish more could be done to find out," said she for the twentieth time to Fenwick one evening, shortly after the musical recital of last chapter. "I don't feel as if it was right to give up advertising. Suppose the poor thing is in Australia or America."

"The poor thing is my hypothetical wife?"

"Exactly so. Well, suppose she is. Some people never see any newspapers at all. And all the while she may have been advertising for *you*."

"Oh no; we should have been sure to see or hear."

"But why? Now I ask you, Mr. Fenwick, suppose she advertised half a dozen times in the 'Melbourne Argus' or the 'New York Sun,' *would* you have seen it, necessarily?"

"I should not, because I never see the 'Melbourne Argus' or the 'New York Sun.' But those agents we paid to look out go steadily through the agony columns—the personal advertisements—of the whole world's press; they would have found it if it had ever been published."

"I dare say they only pocketed the money."

"That they did, no doubt. But they gave me something for it. A hundred and twenty-three advertisements addressed to Fenwicks—none of them to me!"

"But have we advertised enough?"

"Oh, heavens, yes. Think of the answers we've had! I've just received the hundred and forty-second. From a lady in distressed circumstances who bought a piano ten years ago from a party of my name and initials—thought I might be inclined to buy it back at half price. She proposes to call on me early next week."

"Poor Mr. Fenwick! It *is* discouraging, I admit. But, oh dear! fancy if there's some poor thing breaking her heart somewhere! It's easy enough for you—*you* don't believe in her."

"That's it; I don't!" He dropped a tone of pleasantry, and spoke more seriously. "Dear Mrs. Nightingale, if my absence of conviction of the existence of this lady did not rise to the height of a definite disbelief in her altogether—well, I should be wretched. But I feel very strongly that I need not make myself a poor miserable about her. I *don't* believe in her, that's the truth!"



"You don't believe a man could forget his wife?"

"I *can't* believe it, try how I may! Anything—anybody else—but his wife, no!"

Fenwick had come in late in the evening, as he was in the habit of doing, often three or four times in the week. He looked across from his side of the hearthrug, where he had been standing watching the fire, but could not see the face opposite to him. Mrs. Nightingale was sitting with her back to the light, sheltering her eyes from the blaze with a fire-screen. So Fenwick saw only the aureole the lamp made in her hair—it was a fine halo with a golden tinge. Sally was very proud of mamma's hair; it was much better fun to do than her own, said the vulgar child. But even had she not been hidden by the screen, the expression on her face might have meant nothing to him—that is, nothing more than the ready sympathy he was so well accustomed to. A little anxiety of eye, a tremor in the lip, the birth of a frown without a sequel—these might have meant anything or nothing. She might even have turned whiter than she did, and yet not be said to show the cross-fire of torments in her heart. She was, as we told you, a strong woman, either by nature, or else her life had made her one.

For, think of what the recesses of her memory held; think of the past she looked back on, and knew to be nothing but a blank to him. Think of what *she* was, and *he* was, as he stood there and said, "Anybody else, but his wife;" and then rather shaped the "No" that followed with his lips than said it; but shook an emphasis into the word with his head.

"When are you going to get your hair cut, Mr. Fenwick?" said she; and he did think she changed the subject abruptly, without apparent cause. "It's just like a lion's mane when you shake it like that."

"To-morrow, if you think it too disreputable."

"I like it. Sally wants to cut it. . . ."

The last few words showed the completeness of Fenwick's *tame cattitude* in the family. It had developed in an amazingly short time. Was it due to the old attachment of this man and woman—an attachment, mind you, that was sound and strong till it died a violent death? We do not find this so very incredible; perhaps, because that memory of their old parting in the garden went nearer to an actual revival than any other stirring of his mind. But, of course, there may have been others equally strong, only we chance to hear of this one.

That was not our purpose, however, in recording such seeming trivial chat. It was not trivial on Mrs. Nightingale's part. She had made up her mind to flinch from nothing, always to grasp her nettle. Here was a nettle, and she seized it firmly. If she identified as clearly as she did that shaken lion-maned Fenwick's with that of Gerry, the young man of twenty years ago, and seeing its identity was silent, that would be flinching. She would and did say the self-same thing she could recall saying to Gerry. And she asked Fenwick when he was going to get his hair cut with a smile that was like that of the Indian brave under torture. A knife was through her heart. But it was well done, so she thought to herself. If she could be as intrepid as that, she could go on and live. She tried experiments of this sort when the watchful merry eyes of her daughter were not upon her, and even felt glad, this time, that the Major was having a doze underneath a "Daily Telegraph." Fenwick took it all as a matter of course, mere chaff. . . .

Did he? If so, why, after a few words more of chat, did he press his hands on his eyes and shake a puzzled head; then, after an abrupt turn up and down the room, come back to where he stood at first and draw a long breath?

"Was that a recurrence, Mr. Fenwick?" she asked. They had come to speak of these mental discomforts as *recurrences*. They would afflict him, not seldom, without bringing to his mind any definite image. And this was the worst sort. When an image came, his mind felt eased.

"A sort of one."

"Can you tell when it came on?" All this was nettle-grasping. She was getting used to it. "Was it before or after I said that about your hair?"

"After. No, before. Perhaps just about then." Mrs. Nightingale decided that she would not tempt Providence any further. Self-discipline was good, but not carried to danger-point.

"Now sit down and be quiet," she said. "We won't talk any more about unpleasant things. Only the worst of it is," she added, smiling, "that one's topics—yours and mine, I mean—are so limited by the conditions. I should ask any other man who had been about the world, as you *must* have done, all sorts of questions about all sorts of places—where he had been, whom he had seen. You can't answer questions, though I hope you will some day. . . ."

She paused, and he saw the reason. "You see," said he, with a good-humoured laugh, "one gets back directly to the unpleasant subject, whether one will or no. But if I could remember all about my precious self, I might not court catechism about it. . . ."

"*I should not about mine.*" This was said in a low tone, with a silent look on the unraised eyes that was almost an invitation not to hear, and her lips hardly moved to say it, either. He missed it for the moment, but finished his speech with the thought in his mind.

"Still, it's an ill-wind that blows nobody good. See what a clear conscience I have! But what was that *you* said?"

She dropped the fire-screen and raised her eyes—fine eyes they were, which we might have likened to those of Juno had the eyes of oxen been blue—turning them full on him. "When?" said she.

"Just this minute. I ought to have apologised for interrupting you."

"I said I should not court catechism about myself. I should not." Fenwick felt he could not assign this speech its proper place in the dialogue without thinking. He thought gravely, looking to all seeming into the fire for enlightenment; then turned round and spoke.

"Surely that is true, in a sense, of all mankind—mankind and womankind. Nobody wants to be seen through. But one's past would need to be a very shaky one to make one wish for an oblivion like mine to extinguish it."

"I should not dislike it. I have now all that I wish to keep out of the past. I have Sally. There is nothing I could not afford to forget in the past, no one thing the loss of which could alter her in the least, that little monkey of a daughter of mine! And there are many, many things I should like to see the last of." From which speech Fenwick derived an impression that the little monkey, the vulgar child, had come back warm and living and welcome to the speaker's mind, and had driven away some mists of night, some uglinesses that hung about it. How he wished he could ask: "Was one of them her father?" That was not practicable. But it was something of that sort, clearly. His mind could not admit the idea of a haunting remorse, a guilty conscience of an action of her own, in the memory of the woman who spoke to him. He was too loyal to her for that. Besides, the wording of her speech made no such supposition



necessary. Fenwick's answer to it fell back on abstractions—the consolation a daughter must be, and so forth.

“There she is!” said her mother; and then added, as perturbation without heralded Miss Sally's approach: “I will tell you what I meant some other time.” For there she was, no doubt of it, wild with excitement to report the splendid success of the great sestet, the production of which had been the event of the musical gathering she had come from. And you know as well as we do how it is when youth and high spirits burst in upon the sober stay-at-homes, intoxicated with music and lights and supper and too many people talking at once. Sally's eyebrows and teeth alone would have been enough to set all the birds singing in the dullest coppices decorum ever planted, let alone the tales she had to tell of all the strange and wonderful things that had come to pass at the Erskine Peels', who were the givers of the party, and always did things on such a scale.

“And where do you think, mother, Mrs. Erskine Peel gets all those good-looking young men from that come to her parties? Why, from the Stores, of course. Just fancy! . . . How do I know? Why, because I talked to one of them for ever so long, and made him tell me all about it. I detected him, and told him so straight off. How did I recognise him? Why, of course, because he's that young man that came here about the letter. Oh, *you* know, Mr. Fenwick! Gracious me, how slow you are! The young man that brought you the letter to translate. Rather tall, dark eyes.”

“Oh yes, certainly. I remember him quite well. Well, I expect he made a very good young man for a small tea-party.”

“Of course he did, and it's quite ridiculous.” By which the vulgar child meant that class distinctions were ridiculous. She had this way of rushing subjects, eliding the obvious, and relying on her hearers. “He told me all about it. He'd been universally provided, he said; and I promised not to tell. Miss Erskine Peel—that's Orange, you know, the soprano—went to the manager and said her mother said they *must* get more men, though it wasn't dancing, or the rooms looked so bad; only they mustn't be fools, and must be able to say Wagner and Liszt and things. And he hoped I didn't think he was a fool.”

“What did you say?”

“Said I couldn't say—didn't know him well enough. He might be, to look at. Or not, accordingly. I didn't say *that*, you know, mamma.”

"I didn't know, darling. You're very rude sometimes."

"Well, he said he could certainly say Wagner and Liszt, and even more, because—it was rather sad, you know, mamma dear——"

"Sally, you've told that young man he may call; you know you have!"

"Well, mamma dear, and if I have, I don't see that anybody's mare's dead. Because, do listen!" Fenwick interposed a parenthesis.

"I don't think you need to be apprehensive, Mrs. Nightingale. He was an educated young man enough. His not knowing a French phrase like that implies nothing. Not one in a hundred would." The way in which the Major, who, of course, had come out of his doze on the inrush of Miss Sally, looked across at Fenwick as he said this, implied an acquired faith in the judgment of the latter. Sally resumed.

"Just let me tell you. His name's Bradshaw. Only he's no relation to *the* Bradshaw—in a yellow cover, you know. We-e-ell, I don't see anything in that!" Sally is defending her position against a smile her mother and Fenwick have exchanged. They concede that there is nothing in it, and Sally continues. "Where was I? Oh, Bradshaw; yes. He was an awfully promising violinist—awfully promising! And what do you think happened? Why, the nerves of his head gave way, and he couldn't stand the vibration! So it came to being Cattley's or nothing." Sally certainly had the faculty of cutting a long story short.

She thought the story, so cut, one that her mother and Mr. Fenwick might have shown a more active interest in, instead of saying it was time for all of us to be in bed. She did not, however, ascribe to them any external preoccupation—merely an abstract love of Truth; for was it not nearly one o'clock in the morning?

Nevertheless, a little incident of Mr. Fenwick's departure, not noticed at the moment, suddenly assumed vitality just as Sally was "going off," and woke her up. What was it she overheard her mother say to him, just as he was leaving the house, about something she had promised to tell him some time? However, reflection on it with waking faculties dissipated the importance it seemed to have half-way to dreamland, and Sally went contentedly to sleep again.

Fenwick, as he walked to his lodgings through the dull February night, did not regard this something, whatever it was,



as a thing of slight importance at all. He may have been only "spooney," but it was in a sense that left him no pretence for thinking that anything connected with this beautiful young widow-lady could be unimportant to him. On the contrary, she was more and more filling all his waking thoughts, and becoming the pivot on which all things turned. It is true, he "dismissed from his mind"—whatever that means—every presumptuous suggestion that in some precious time to come she might be willing to throw in her lot with his own, and asked himself what sort of thing was he that he should allow such an idea to come even as far as contradiction-point? He, a poor inexplicable wreck! What was the Self he had to offer, and what else had he? But, indeed, the speculation rarely got even to this maturity, so promptly was it nipped in the bud. Only, there were so many buds to nip. He became aware that he was giving a good deal of attention to this sort of gardening.

Also, he had a consciousness that he was growing morbidly anxious for the maintenance of his own oblivion. That which was at first only a misgiving about what a return of memory might bring to light, was rapidly becoming a definite desire that nothing should come to light at all. How *could* he look forward to that "hypothetical" wife whom he did not in the least believe in, but who might be somewhere, for all that! He knew perfectly well that his relations with Krakatoa Villa would *not* remain the same, say what you might! Of course, he also knew that he had no relations there that *need* change—most certainly not! At this point an effort would be made against the outcrop of his thoughts. Those confounded buds were always bursting. It was impossible to be even with them.

Perhaps it was on this evening, or rather early morning, as he walked home to his lodgings, that Fenwick began to recognise more fully than he had done before Mrs. Nightingale's share in what was, if not an absolute repugnance to a revival of the unknown past, at least a very ready acquiescence in his ignorance of it. "But surely," he reasoned with himself, "if this cause is making me contented with my darkness, it is the more reason that it should be penetrated."

An uncomfortable variation of his dream of the resurrected first-floor crossed his mind. Suppose he had forgotten the furniture, but remembered the place, and gone back to tenant it with a van-load of new chairs and tables. What would he have done with the poor old furniture?



## CHAPTER XI

It is impossible to make Gluck's music anything but a foretaste of heaven, as long as there is any show of accuracy in the way it is rendered. But then, you must go straight on, and not go over a difficult phrase until you know it. You must play fair. Orpheus would probably only have provoked Cerberus—certainly wouldn't have put him to sleep—if he had practised, and counted, and gone back six bars and done it again.

But Cerberus wasn't at 260, Ladbroke Grove Road, on the Tuesday following Mrs. Erskine Peel's musical party, which was the next time Sally went to Lætitia Wilson. And it was as well that he wasn't, for Sally stuck in a passage at the end of one page and the beginning of the next, so that you had to turn over in the middle; and it was bad enough, goodness knew, without that! It might really have been the North-West passage, so insuperable did it seem.

"I shall never get it right, I know, Tishy," said the viola.

And the violin replied: "Because you never pay any attention to the arpeggio, dear. It doesn't begin on the chord. It begins on the G flat. Look here, now. One—two—three. One—two—three."

"Yes, that's all very well. Who's going to turn over the leaf, I should like to know? I know I shall never do it. Not because the nerves of my head are giving way, but because I'm a duffer."

"I suppose you know what that young man is, dear?" Sally accepts this quite contentedly, and immediately skips a great deal of unnecessary conversation.

"I'm not in love with him, Tishy dear."

"Didn't say you were, dear. But I suppose you don't know what he is, all the same." Which certainly seems inconsecutive, but we really cannot be responsible for the way girls talk.

"Don't know, and don't want to know. What is he?"

"He's from Cattley's." This throws a light on the conversation. It shows that Sally had told Lætitia who she was going to meet at her mother's next evening. Sally is not surprised.

"As if I didn't know all about that! As if he didn't tell me his story!"

"Like the mock-turtle in Alice?"

"Now, Tishy dear, is that an insinuation, or isn't it? Do be candid!"

"The mock-turtle told his story. Once, he was a real turtle."

"Very well, Tishy dear. That's as much as to say Julius Bradshaw is mock. I can't see where the mockness comes in myself. He told *me* all about it, plain enough."

"Yes—and you know what a rage Mrs. Erskine Peel is in, and says it was an *éclaircissement*."

"Why can't she be satisfied with English? . . . What! Of course, there are *hundreds* of English equivalents for *éclaircissement*. There's bust-up."

"That's only one."

"Tishy dear, don't be aggravating! Keep to the point. Why mustn't I have Julius Bradshaw to play with if I like because he's at Cattley's?"

"You may, if you *like*, dear! As long as you're satisfied, it's all right."

"What fault have you to find with him?"

"I! None at all. It's all perfectly right."

"You are *the* most irritating girl."

"Suppose we take the *adagio* now—if you're rested."

But Sally's back was up. "Not until you tell me what you really mean about Julius Bradshaw."

So Lætitia had her choice between an explicit statement of her meaning, and an unsupported incursion into the *adagio*.

"I suppose you'll admit there *are* such things as social distinctions?"

Sally wouldn't admit anything whatever. If sociometry was to be a science, it must be worked out without axioms or postulates. Lætitia immediately pointed out that if there were no such things as social distinctions, of course there was no reason why Mr. Julius Bradshaw shouldn't take his violin to Krakatoa Villa. "Or here, or anywhere," concluded Lætitia, with a touch of pride in the status of Ladbroke Grove Road. Whereupon Sally surrendered as much of her case as she had left.

"You talk as if he was a sweep or a dustman," said she.

"I don't see why you should mind if I do, dear. Because, if there are to be no social distinctions, there's no reason why all the sweeps and dustmen in Christendom shouldn't come and play the violin at Krakatoa Villa. . . . Now, not *too* slow, you know. One—two—three—four—that'll do." Perhaps Sally felt it would be a feeble line of defence to dwell on the scarcity of good violinists among sweeps and dustmen, and that was why she fell into rank without comment.

This short conversation, some weeks on in the story, lets in one or two gleams of side-light. It shows that Sally's permission to the young man Bradshaw to call at her mother's had been promptly taken advantage of—jumped at is the right expression. Also that Miss Wilson had stuck-up ideas. Also that Sally was a disciple of what used to be called Socialism; only really nowadays such a lot of things get called Socialism that the word has lost all the discriminative force one values so much in nouns substantive. Also (only we knew it already) that Sally was no lawyer. We do not love her the less, for our part.

But nothing in this interchange of shots between Sally and her friend, nor in anything she said to her mother about Mr. Bradshaw, gives its due prominence to the fact that, though that young gentleman was a devout worshipper at the shrine of St. Satisfax, he had only become so on the Sunday after Miss Sally had casually mentioned the latter as a saint she frequented. Perhaps she "dismissed it from her mind," and it was obliging enough to go. Perhaps she considered she had done her duty by it when she put on record, in soliloquy, her opinion that if people chose to be gaping idiots they might, and she couldn't help it. She had a happy faculty for doing what she called putting young whipper-snappers in their proper places. This only meant that she managed to convey to them that the lines they might elect to whipper-snap on were not to be those of sentimental nonsense. And perhaps she really dealt in the wisest way with Mr. Bradshaw's romantic adoration of her at a distance when he fished for leave to call upon her. The line he made his application on was that he should so like to play her a rapid movement by an unpronounceable Slav. She said directly, why not come and bring his violin on Wednesday evening at nine? That was her mother's address on the card on the fiddle-case. He must recollect it—which he did unequivocally.



Now, if this young lady had had a fan, she might have tittered with it, or blushed slightly, and said, "Oh, Mr. Bradshaw!" or, "Oh, sir!" like in an old novel—one by Fanny Burney, or the like. But she did nothing of the sort, and the consequence was that he had, as it were, to change the *venue* of his adoration—to make it a little less romantic, in fact. Her frank and breezy treatment of the subject had let in a gust of fresh air, and blown away all imagination. For there naturally was a good deal of that in a passion based on a single interview and nourished by weekly stimulants at morning services. In fact, when he presented himself at Krakatoa Villa on Wednesday evening as invited—the day after Lætitia's remarks about his social position—he was quite prepared to be introduced to the young woman's *fiancé*, if . . . Only, when he got as far as the *if*, he dropped the subject. As soon as he found there was no such person he came to believe he would not have been much disconcerted if there had been. How far this was true, who can say?

He was personally one of those young men about whom you may easily produce a false impression if you describe them at all. This is because your reader will take the bit in his teeth, and run away with an idea. If you say a nose has a bridge to it, this directly produces in some minds an image like Blackfriars Bridge; that it is straight, the Æginetan marbles; that it is *retroussé*, the dog in that Hogarth portrait. Suggest a cheerful countenance, and you stamp your subject for ever as a Shakespearian clown. So you must be content to know that Mr. Bradshaw was a good-looking young man, of dark complexion, and of rather over medium height and good manners. If he had not been, he would never, as an article of universal provision for parties, have passed muster at Cattley's. He was like many other young men such as one sees in shops; but then, what very nice-looking young men one sometimes sees there! Sally had classed him as a young whipper-snapper, but this was unjust, if it impugned his stature. She repeated the disparaging epithet when, in further justification to Miss Wilson of her asking him to her mother's house, she sketched a policy of conduct to guide inexperienced girls in their demeanour towards new male friends. "You let 'em come close to, and have a good look," said the vulgar child. "Half of 'em will be disgusted, and go away in a huff."

Mrs. Nightingale had known Mr. Bradshaw for a long time

as a customer at a shop knows the staff in the background, mere office secretions, who only ooze out at intervals. For Bradshaw was not strictly a counter-jumper, although Miss Wilson more than once spoke of him so, adding, when it was pointed out to her that theoretically he never went behind counters, by jumping or otherwise, that that didn't make the slightest difference: the principle was the same.

Sally's mother did not share her friend's fancies. But she had not confidence enough in the stability of the earth's crust to give way freely to her liberalism, drive a coach and six through the Classes, and talk to him freely about the shop. She did not know what a Social Seismologist would say on the point. So she contented herself with treating him as a matter of course, as a slight acquaintance whom she saw often, merely asking him if that was he. To which the reply was in the affirmative, like question-time in the Commons.

"Is this the Strad? Let's have it out," says Sally. For Mr. Bradshaw possessed a Strad. He brought it out of its coffin with something of the solicitude Petrarch might have shown to the remains of Laura, and when he had rough-sketched its condition of discord and corrected the drawing, danced a Hungarian dance on it, and apologised for his presumption in doing so. He played so very well that it certainly did seem rather a cruel trick of Fate that gave him nerves in his head. Sally then said, might she look at it? and played chords and runs, just to feel what it was like. Her comment was that she wished her viola was a Strad.

We record all this to show what, perhaps, is hardly worth the showing—a wavering in a man's mind, and that man a young one. Are they not at it all day long, all of them? Do they do anything but waver?

When Sally said she wished her viola was a Strad, Mr. Bradshaw's mind shortly became conscious that some passing spook, of a low nature, had murmured almost inaudibly that it was a good job *his* Strad wasn't a viola. "Because, you see," added the spook, "that quashes all speculation whether you, Mr. Bradshaw, are glad or sorry you needn't lay your instrument at this young lady's feet. Now, if immediately after you first had that overwhelming impression of her—got metaphorically torpedoed, don't you know?—such a wish as hers had been expressed, you probably would have laid both your Strad and your heart at her feet, and said take my all!" But now that he had been so far



disillusioned by Sally's robust and breezy treatment of the position, he was not quite sure the spook had not something to say for himself. Mr. Bradshaw was content to come down off his high horse, and to plod along the dull path of a mere musical evening visitor at a very nice house. Pleasant, certainly, but not the aim of his aspirations from afar at St. Satisfax's. His *amour propre* was a little wounded by that spook, too. Nothing keeps it up to the mark better than a belief in one's stability—in love-matters, especially.

He was not quite sure of the exact moment the spook intruded his opinion, so *we* can't be expected to know. Perhaps about the time Miss Wilson came in (just as he was showing how carefully he had listened to Joachim) and said could *he* play those? She wished *she* could. She was thrown off her guard by the finished execution, and for the moment quite forgot Cattley's and the classitudes. Sally instantly perceived her opening. She would enjoy catching Tishy out in any sort of way. So she said: "Mr. Bradshaw will show you how, Tishy dear; of course he will. Only, not now, because if we don't begin, we shan't have time for the long quartet." If you say this sort of things about strangers in Society, you really ought to give them a chance. So thought Lætitia to herself, and resolved to blow Sally up at the first opportunity.

As for that culprit, she contemplated her work, from her own position of perfect security, with complacency at least. And she felt at the end of her evening (which we needn't dwell on, as it was all crotchets, minims, and F sharps and G flats) that her entrenchments had become spontaneously stronger without exertion on her part. For there were Tishy and Mr. Bradshaw, between whom Sally had certainly understood there was a great gulf fixed, sitting on the very same sofa and talking about a Stradivarius. She concluded that, broadly speaking, Debrett's bark is worse than his bite, and that he is, at heart, a very accommodating character.

"I hope you saw Tishy, mamma dear." So spoke Sally to her mother, after the musicians first, and then Fenwick, had dispersed their several ways. Mrs. Nightingale seemed very *distracte* and preoccupied.

"Saw Tishy what, kitten?"

"Tishy and Mr. Bradshaw on that sofa."

"No, darling. Oh yes, I did. What about them?"

"After all that rumpus about shop-boys!" But her mother's



attention is not easy to engage this evening, somehow. Her mind seems somewhere else altogether. But from where it is, it sees the vulgar child very plainly indeed, as she puts up her face to be kissed with all its animation on it. She kisses it, animation and all, caressing the rich black hair with a hand that seems thoughtful. A hand can. Then she makes a little effort to shake off something that draws her away, and comes back rather perfunctorily to her daughter's sphere of interest and the life of town.

"Did Lætitia call Mr. Bradshaw a shop-boy, chick?"

"Very nearly—at least, I don't know what you call not calling anybody shop-boy if she didn't." Her mother makes a further effort—comes back a little more.

"What did she say, child?"

"Said you could always tell, and it was no use my talking, and the negro couldn't change his spots."

"She has some old-fashioned ideas. But how about calling him a shop-boy?"

"Not in words, but worse. Tishy always goes round and round. I wish she'd *say*! However, Dr. Vereker quite agrees with me. *We think it dishonest!*"

"What did Dr. Vereker think of Mr. Bradshaw?" We have failed to note that the doctor was the 'cello in the quartet.

"Now, mamma darling, fancy asking Dr. Prosy what he thinks! I wasn't going to. Besides, as if it mattered what they think of each other!... Who? Why, men, of course!"

"Mr. Fenwick's a man, and you asked him."

"Mr. Fenwick's a man on other lines—absolutely other. He doesn't come in really." Her mother repeats the last four words, not exactly derisively—rather, if anything, her accent and her smile may be said to caress her daughter's words as she says them. She is such a silly, but such a dear little goose—that seems the implication.

"We-e-ll," says Sally, as she has said before, and we have tried to spell her. "I don't see anything in that, because, look how reasonable! Mr. Fenwick's... Mr. Fenwick's... why, of course, entirely different. I say, mother dearest..."

"What, kitten?"

"What were you and Mr. Fenwick talking about so seriously in the back drawing-room?" The two are upstairs in the front bedroom at this minute, by-the-bye.

"Did you hear us, darling?"

"No, because of the row. But one could tell, for all that." Then Sally sees in an instant that it is something her mother is not going to tell her about, and makes immediate concession. "Where was the Major going that he couldn't come?" she asks. "He generally makes a point of coming when it's music."

"I fancy he's dining at the Hurkaru," says her mother. But she has gone back into her preoccupation, and from within it externalises an opinion that we should be better in bed, or we shall never be up in the morning.

## CHAPTER XII

As soon as ever Mr. Bradshaw touched his violin, and before ever he began to play his Hungarian dance on all four strings at once, Mrs. Nightingale and Mr. Fenwick went away into the back drawing-room, not to be too near the music. Because there was a fire in both rooms.

In the interval of time that had passed since Christmas Sally had contrived to "dismiss from her mind" Colonel Lund's provisions about her mother and Mr. Fenwick. Or they had given warning, and gone of their own accord. For by now she had again fallen into the frame of mind which classified her mother and Fenwick as semi-elderly people, and, so to speak, out of it all. So her mind assented readily to distance from the music as a sufficient reason for a secession to the back room. Non-combatants are just as well off the field of battle.

But a closer observer than Sally at this moment would have noticed that chat in an undertone had already set in in the back drawing-room even before the Hungarians had stopped dancing. Also that the applause that came therefrom, when they did stop, had a certain perfunctory air, as of plaudits something else makes room for, and comes back again after. Not that she would have "seen anything in it" if she had, because, whatever her mother said or did was, in Sally's eyes, right and normal. Abnormal and bad things were conceived and executed outside the family. Nor, in spite of the *sotto voce*, was there anything Sally could not have participated in, whatever exception she might have taken to something of a patronising tone, inexcusable towards our own generation even in the most semi-elderly people on record.

Her mother, at Sally's latest observation-point, had taken the large arm-chair quite on the other side of the rug, to be as far off the music as possible. Mr. Fenwick, in reply to a flying remark of her own, she being at the moment a music-book seeker,



wouldn't bring the other large arm-chair in front of the fire and be comfortable, thank you. He liked this just as well. Sally had then commented on Mr. Fenwick's unnatural love of uncomfortable chairs "when he wasn't walking about the room." She fancied, as she passed on, that she heard her mother address him as "Fenwick," without the "Mr." So she did.

"You are a restless man, Fenwick! I wonder were you so before the accident? Oh dear! there I am on that topic again!" But he only laughed.

"It doesn't hurt *me*," he said. "That reminds me that I wanted to remind *you* of something you said you would tell me. You know—that evening the kitten went to the music-party—something you would tell me some time."

"I know; I'll tell you when they've got to their music, if there isn't too much row. Don't let's talk while this new young man's playing; it seems unkind. It won't matter when they're all at it together." But in spite of good resolutions silence was not properly observed, and the perfunctory pause came awkwardly on the top of a lapse. Fenwick then said, as one who avails himself of an opportunity:

"No need to wait for the music; they can't hear a word we say in there. We can't hear a word *they* say."

"Because they're making such a racket." Mrs. Nightingale paused with a listening eye, trying to disprove their inaudibility. The examination confirmed Fenwick. "I like it," she continued—"a lot of young voices. It's much better when you don't make out what they say. When you can't hear a word, you fancy some sense in it." And then went on listening, and Fenwick waited, too. He couldn't well fidget her to keep her promise; she would do it of herself in time. It might be she preferred talking under cover of the music. She certainly remained silent till it came; then she spoke.

"What was it made me say that to you about something I would tell you? Oh, I know. You said, perhaps if you knew your past, you would not court catechism about it. And I said that, knowing mine, *I* should not either. Wasn't that it?" She fixed her eyes on him as though to hold him to the truth. Perhaps she wanted his verbal recognition of the possibility that she, too, like others, might have left things in the past she would like to forget on their merits—cast-off garments on the road of life. It may have been painful to her to feel his faith in herself an obstacle to what she wished at least to hint to him, even if

she could not tell him outright. She did not want too much divine worship at her shrine—a ready recognition of her position of mortal frailty would be so much more sympathetic, really. A feeling perhaps traceably akin to what many of us have felt, that if our father the devil—"auld Nickie Ben"—would only tak' a thought and mend, as he aiblins might, he would be the very king of father confessors. If details had to be gone into, we should be sure of *his* sympathy.

"Yes, that was it. And I suppose I looked incredulous." Thus Fenwick.

"You looked incredulous. I would sooner you should believe me. Would you hand me down that fire-screen off the chimney-piece? Thank you." She was hardening herself to the task she had before her. He gave her the screen, and as he resumed his seat drew it nearer to her. Mozart's Op. 999 had just started, and it was a little doubtful if voices could be heard unless, in Sally's phrase, they were close to.

"I shall believe you. Does what you were going to tell me relate to——"

"Go on."

"To your husband?"

"Yes." The task had become easier suddenly. She breathed more freely about what was to come. "I wish you to know that he may be still living. I have heard nothing to the contrary. But I ought to speak of him as the man who was my husband. He is no longer that." Fenwick interposed on her hesitation.

"You have divorced him?" But she shook her head—shook a long negative. And Fenwick looked up quickly, and uttered a little sharp "Ah!" as though something had struck him. The slow head-shake said as plain as words could have said it, "I wish I could say yes." So expressive was it that Fenwick did not even speculate on the third alternative—a separation without a divorce. He saw at once he could make it easier for her if he spoke out plain, treating the bygone as a thing that *could* be spoken of plainly.

"He divorced you?" She was very white, but kept her eyes steadily fixed on him over the fire-screen, and her voice remained perfectly firm and collected. The music went on intricately all the while. She spoke next.

"To all intents and purposes. There was a technical obstacle to a legal divorce, but he tried for one. We parted sorely against

my will, for I loved him, and now it is over nineteen years since I saw him last, or heard of him or from him. But he was absolutely blameless. Unless, indeed, it is to be counted blame to him that he could not bear what no other man could have borne. I cannot possibly give you all details. But I wish you to hear this that I have to tell you from myself. It is painful to me to tell, but it would be far worse that you should hear it from anyone else. I feel sure it is safe to tell you; that you will not talk of it to others—least of all to that little chick of mine.”

“You may trust me—indeed, you may—without reserve. I see you wish to tell me no more, so I will not ask it.”

“And blame me as little as possible?”

“I cannot blame you.”

“Before you say that, listen to as much as I can tell you of the story. I was a young girl when I went out alone to be married to him in India. We had parted in England eight months before, and he had remained unchanged—his letters all told the same tale. I quarrelled with my mother—as I now see most unreasonably—merely because she wished to marry again. Perhaps she was a little to blame not to be more patient with a headstrong, ill-regulated girl. I was both. It ended in my writing out to him in India that I should come out and marry him at once. My mother made no opposition.” She remained silent for a little, and her eyes fell. Then she spoke with more effort, rather as one who answers her own thoughts. “No, I need say nothing of the time between. It was no excuse for the wrong I did *him*. I can tell you what that was....” It did not seem easy, though, when it came to actual words. Fenwick spoke into the pause.

“Why tell me now? Tell me another time.”

“I prefer now. It was this way: I kept something back from him till after we were married—something I should have told him before. Had I done so, I believe to this moment we should never have parted. But my concealment threw doubt on all else I said.... I am telling more than I meant to tell.” She hesitated again, and then went on. “That was my wrong to him—the concealment. But, of course, it was not the ground of the divorce proceedings.” Fenwick stopped her again.

“Why tell me any more? You are being led on—are leading yourself on—to say more than you wish.”

“Well, I will leave it there. Only, Fenwick, understand this: my husband was young and generous and noble-hearted. Had



I trusted him, I believe all might have gone well, even though he . . .” She hesitated again, and then cancelled something unsaid. “The concealment was my fault—the mistrust. That was all. Nothing else was my *fault*.” As she says the words in praise of her husband she finds it a pleasure to let her eyes rest on the grave, handsome, puzzled face that, after all, really is *his*. She catches herself wondering—so oddly do the undercurrents of mind course about—where he got that sharp white scar across his nose. It was not there in the old days.

She looks at him until he, too, looks up, and their eyes meet. “Well, then,” she says, “I will tell you no more. Blame me as little as possible.” And to this repetition of her previous words he says again, “I cannot blame you,” very emphatically.

But Mrs. Nightingale felt perplexed at his evident sincerity ; would rather he should have indulged in truisms, we were not all of us perfect, and so forth. When she spoke again, some bars of the music later, she took for granted that his mind, like hers, was still dwelling on his last words. She felt half sorry she had, so to speak, switched off the current of the conversation.

“If you will think over what I have told you, Fenwick, you will see that you cannot help doing so.”

“How can that be ?”

“Surely ! My husband sought to divorce me, and was himself absolutely blameless. How can you do otherwise than blame me ?”

“Partly—only partly—because I see you are keeping back something—something that would exonerate you. I cannot believe you were to blame.”

“Listen, Fenwick ! As I said, I cannot tell you the whole ; and the Major, who is the only man alive who knows all the story, will, I know, refuse to tell you anything, even if you ask him, and that I wish you not to do.”

“I should not dream of asking him.”

“Well, he would refuse. I know it. But I want you to know all I can tell you. I do not want any groundless excuses made for me. I will not accept any absolution from anyone on a false pretence. You see what I mean.”

“I see perfectly. I am not sure, though, that you see my meaning. But never mind that. Is there anything further you would really like me to know ?”

She waited a little, and then answered, keeping her eyes always fixed on Fenwick : “Yes, there is.”

But at this moment the first movement of Op. 999 came to a perfect and well-thought-out conclusion, bearing in mind everything that had been said on six pages of ideas faultlessly interchanged by four instruments, and making due allowance for all exceptions each had courteously taken to the other. But Op. 999 was going on to the second movement directly, and only tolerated a pause for a few string-tightenings and trial-squeaks, to get in tune, and the removal of a deceased fly from a piano-candle. The remark from the back-room that we could hear beautifully in here seemed to fall flat, the second violin merely replying "All right !" passionlessly. The instruments then asked each other if they were ready, and answered yes. Then some one counted four suggestively, for a start, and life went on again.

Mrs. Nightingale and Fenwick sat well on into the music before either spoke. He, resolved not to seem to seek or urge any information at all ; all was to come spontaneously from her. She, feeling the difficulty of telling what she had to tell, and always oppressed with the recollection of what it had cost her to make her revelation to this self-same man nineteen years ago. She wished he would give the conversation some lift, as he had done before, when he asked if what she had to tell referred to her husband. But, although he would gladly have repeated his assistance, he could see his way to nothing, this time, that seemed altogether free from risk. How if he were to blunder into ascribing to her something more culpable than her actual share in the past ? She half guessed this ; then, seeing that speech must come from herself in the end, took heart and faced the position resolutely. She always did.

"You know this, Fenwick, do not you, that when there is a divorce, the husband takes the children from their mother ?—always, when she is in the wrong ; too often, when she is blameless. I have told you I was the one to blame, and I tell you now that though my husband's application for a divorce failed, from a technical point of law, all things came about just as though he had succeeded. Don't analyse it now ; take it all for granted—you understand ?"

"I understand. Suppose it so ! And then ?"

"And then this. That little monkey of mine—that little unconscious fiddling thing in there"—and as Mrs. Nightingale speaks, the sound of a caress mixes with the laugh in her voice ; but the pain comes back as she goes on—"My Sallikin has been mine, all her life ! My poor husband never saw her in her child-



hood." As she says the word *husband*, she has again a vivid *éclat* of the consciousness that it is he—himself—sitting there beside her. And the odd thought that mixes itself into this, strange to say, is—"The pity of it! to think how little he has had of Sally in all these years!"

He, for his part, can for the moment make nothing of this part of the story. He can give his head the lion-maned shake she knows him by so well, but it brings him no light. He is reduced to mere slow repetition of her data; his hand before his eyes to keep his brain, that has to think, clear of distractions from without.

"Your husband never saw her. She has been yours all her life. Had she been your husband's child, he would have exercised his so-called rights—his *legal* rights—and taken her away. Are those the facts—so far?"

"Yes—go on. No—stop; I will help you. At the beginning of this year I should have been married exactly twenty years. Sally is nineteen—you remember her birthday?"

"Nineteen in August. Now, let me think!" Just at this moment the second movement of Op. 999 came to an end, and gave an added plausibility to the blank he needed to ponder in. The viola in the next room looked round across her chair-back, and said, "I say, mother"—to a repetition of which Mrs. Nightingale replied what did her daughter say? What she said was that her mother and Mr. Fenwick were exactly like the canaries. They talked as hard as they could all through the music, and when it stopped they shut up. Wasn't that true? To which her mother answered affirmatively, adding, "You'll have to put a cloth over us, chick, and squash us out."

Fenwick was absorbed in thought, and did not notice this interlude. He did not speak until the music began again. Then he said abruptly:

"I see the story now. Sally's father was not..."

"Was not my husband." There is not a trace of cowardice or hesitation in her filling out of the sentence. There is pain, but that again dies away in her voice as she goes on to speak of her daughter. "I do not connect him with her now. She is—a thing of itself—a thing of herself! She is—she is Sally. Well, you see what she is."

"I see she is a very dear little person." Then he seems to want to say something and to pause on the edge of it; then, in answer to a "Yes" of encouragement from her, continues, "I



was going to say that she must be very like him—like her father.”

“Very like?” she asks—“or very unlike? Which did you mean?”

“I mean very like as to looks. Because she is so unlike you.”

“She is like enough to him, as far as looks go. It’s her only fault, poor chick, and *she* can’t help it. Besides, I mind it less now that I have more than half forgiven him, for her sake.” The tone of her voice mixes a sob and a laugh, although she utters neither, and is quite collected. “But she is quite unlike him in character. Sally is not an angel—oh dear, no!” The laugh predominates. “But——”

“But what?”

“She is not a devil.” And as she said this the pain was all back again in the dropped half-whisper in which she said it. And in that moment Fenwick made his guess of the whole story, which maybe went nearer than we shall do with the information we have to go upon. In this narrative, as we tell it now, that story is *known* only to its chief actor, and to her old friend who is now dining at the Hurkaru Club.

The third movement of Op. 999 was not a very long one, and, coming to an end at this point, seemed to supply a reason for silence that was not unwelcome in the back drawing-room. The end of a trying conversation had been attained. Both speakers could now affect attention to what was going on in the front. This had taken the form of a discussion between Mr. Julius Bradshaw and Miss Lætitia Wilson, who was anxious to transfer her position of first violin to that young gentleman. We regret to have to report that Miss Sally’s agreement with her friend about the desirability had been *sotto voce*’d in these terms: “Yes, Tishy dear! Do make the shop-boy play the last movement.” And Miss Wilson had then suggested it, saying there was a bit she knew she couldn’t play. “And you expect *me* to!” said the owner of the Strad, “when I haven’t so much as looked at it for three years past.” To which Miss Sally appended a marginal note, “Stuff and nonsense! Don’t be affected, Mr. Bradshaw.” However, after compliments, and more protestations from its owner, the Strad was brought into hotchpot, and Lætitia abdicated.

“Won’t you come and sit in here, to be away from the music?” said the back-drawing-room. But Lætitia wanted to see Mr.

Bradshaw's fingering of that passage. We are more interested in the back drawing-room.

Like many other athletic men—and we have seen how strongly this character was maintained in Fenwick—he hated arm-chairs. Even in the uncomfortable ones—by which we mean the ones *we* dislike—his restless strength would not remain quiet for any length of time. At intervals he would get up and walk about the room, exasperating the sedate, and then making good-humoured concession to their weakness. Mrs. Nightingale could remember all this in Gerry the boy, twenty years ago.

If it had not been for that music, probably he would have walked about the room over that stiff problem in dates he had just grappled with. As it was, he remained in his chair to solve it—that is, if he did solve it. Possibly, the moment he saw something important turned on the date of Sally's birth, he jumped across the solution to the conclusion it was to lead to. Given the conclusion, the calculation had no interest for him.

But the story his mind constructed to fit that conclusion stunned him. It knitted his brows and clenched his teeth for him. It made the hand that had been hanging loose over the uncomfortable chair-back close savagely on something—a throat, perhaps, that his imagination supplied? How like he looked, thought his companion, to himself on one occasion twenty years ago! But his anger now was on her behalf alone; it was not so in that dreadful time she hoped he might never recollect. If only his memory of all the past might remain as now, a book with a locked clasp and a lost key!

She watched him as he sat there, and saw a calmer mood come back upon him. Each wanted a *raison d'être* for a silent pause, and neither was sorry for the desire each might ascribe to the other of hearing the last movement of the music undisturbed. Op. 999 was prospering, there was no doubt of it! Lætitia Wilson was a very fair example of a creditable career at the R.A.M. But she was not quite equal to this unfortunate victim of a too nervous system, who could play like an angel for half an hour, mind you—not more. This was his half-hour; and it was quite reasonable for Fenwick to take for granted that his hostess would like to pay attention to it, or *vice-versa*. So both sat silent.

But as she sat listening to Op. 999, and watching wonderingly the strange victim of oblivion, of whom she knew—scarcely acknowledging it always, though—that she had once for a short



time called him husband, her mind went back to an old time when he and she were young: before the tragic memory that she sometimes thought might have been lived down had come into her life and his. And a scene rose up before her out of that old time—a scene of young men, almost boys, and girls who but the other day were in the nursery, playing lawn-tennis in a happy garden, with never a thought for anything in this wide world but themselves, and each other, and the scoring, and how jolly it would be in the house-boat at Henley to-morrow. And then this garden-scene a little later in the moonrise, and herself and one of the players, who was Gerry—this very man—left by the other two to themselves, on a garden-seat his arm hung over, just as it did now over that chair-back. How exactly he sat then as he sat now, his other hand in charge of the foot he had crossed on his knee, just as now, to keep it from a slip along his lawn-tennis flannels! How well she could remember the tennis-shoe, with its ribbed rubber sole, in place of that highly-polished calf thing! And she could remember every word they said, there in the warm moonlight.

“What a silly boy you are!”

“I don’t care. I shall always say exactly the same. I can’t help it.”

“All silly boys say that sort of thing. Then they change their minds.”

“I never said it to any girl in my life but you, Rosey. I never thought it. I shall never say it again to anyone but you.”

“Don’t be nonsensical!”

“I’m *not*! It’s *true*.”

“Wait till you’ve been six months in India, Gerry.”

And then the recollection of what followed made it seem infinitely strange to her that Fenwick should remain, as he had remained, immovable. If the hand she could remember so well, for all it had grown so scarred and service-worn and hairy, were to take hers as it did then, as they sat together on the garden-seat, would it shake now as formerly? If his great strong arm her memory still felt round her were to come again now, would she feel in it the tremor of the passion he was shaken by then; and in caresses such as she half reproved him for, but had no heart to resist, the reality of a love then young and strong and full of promise for the days to come? And now—what? The perished trunk of an uprooted tree: the shadow of a half-forgotten dream.



As he sat silent, only now and then by some slight sign, some new knitting of the brow or closing of the hand, showing the tension of the feeling produced by the version his mind had made of the story half told to him—as he sat thus, under a kind of feint of listening to the music, the world grew stranger and stranger to his companion. She had fancied herself strong enough to tell the story, but had hardly reckoned with his possible likeness to himself. She had thought that she could keep the twenty years that had passed clearly in her mind; could deal with the position from a good, sensible, matter-of-fact standpoint.

The past was past, and happily forgotten by him. The present had still its possibilities, if only the past might remain forgotten. Surely she could rely on herself to find the nerve to go through what was, after all, a mere act of duty. Knowing, or rather feeling, that Fenwick would ask her to marry him as soon as he dared—it was merely a question of time—her duty was plainly to forewarn him—to make sure that he was alive to the antecedents of the woman he was offering himself to. She knew *his* antecedents; as many as she wished to know. If the twenty years of oblivion concealed irregularity, immorality—well, was she not to blame for it? Was ever a better boy than Gerry, as she knew him, to the day they parted? It was her fault or misfortune that had cast him all adrift. As to that troublesome question of a possible wife elsewhere, in the land of his oblivion, she had quite made up her mind about that. Every effort had been made to find such a one, and failed. If she reappeared, it would be her own duty to surrender Fenwick—if he wished to go back. If he did not, and his other wife wished to be free, surely in the *chicane* of the law-courts there must be some shuffle that could be for once made useful to a good end.

Mrs. Nightingale had reasoned it all out in cold blood, and she was, as we have told you, a strong woman. But had she really taken her own measure? Could she sit there much longer, with him beside her, and his words of twenty years ago sounding in her ears?—almost the feeling of the kisses she had so dutifully pointed out the lawlessness, and allowed the repetition of, in that old forgotten time—forgotten by him, never by her! Was it possible to bear, without crying out, the bewilderment of a mixed existence such as that his presence and identity forced upon her, wrenching her this way and that, interweaving the woof of *then* with the weft of *now*, even as in that labyrinth of

musical themes and phrases in the other room they crossed and recrossed one another at the bidding of each instrument as its turn came to tell its tale ? Her brain reeled and her heart ached under the intolerable stress. Could she still hold on, or would she be, after all, driven to make some excuse, and run for the solitude of her own room to live down the tension as best she might alone ?

The music itself came to her assistance. Its triumphant strength, in an indescribable outburst of hope or joy or mastery of Fate, as it drew near to its final close, spoke to her of the great ocean that lies beyond the crabbed limits of our stunted lives, the boundless sea our rivulets of life steal down to, to be lost in ; and while it lasted made it possible for her to be still. She took her eyes from Fenwick, and waited. When she raised them again, in the silence Op. 999 came to an end in, she saw that he had moved. His face had gone into his hands ; and as she looked up, his old action of rubbing them into his loose hair, and shaking it, had come back, and his strong identity with his boyhood, dependent on the chance of a moment, had disappeared. He got up suddenly, and after a turn across the room he was in, walked into the other one, and contributed his share to the babble of felicitation or comment that followed what was clearly thought an achievement in musical rendering.

“ Oh dear, oh dear ! ” said Lætitia Wilson. “ Was ever a poor girl so sat upon ? I feel quite flat ! ” This was not meant to be taken too much *au pied de la lettre*. It was merely a method of praise of Mr. Bradshaw.

“ But what a jolly shame you had to give it up ! ” This was Sally in undisguised admiration. But in Mr. Julius Bradshaw’s eyes, Sally’s identity had undergone a change. Her breezy frankness had made hay of a *grande passion*, and was blowing the hay all over the field. He had come close to, and had a good look ; but he will hardly go away in a huff, although he feels a little silly over his public worship of these past weeks. Just at this moment of the story, however, he is very apologetic towards Miss Wilson ; on whom, if she reports correctly, he has sat. He tries no pretences with a view to her reinstatement, even on a par with himself. He knows, and every one knows, they would be seen through immediately. It is no use assuring her she is a capital player, of her years. Much better let it alone !

“ Are you any the worse, Mr. Bradshaw ? ” says Dr. Vereker.



Obviously, as a medical authority, it is his duty to "voice" this enquiry. So he voices it.

"N—no ; but that's about as much as I can do, with safety. It won't do to spoil my night's rest, and be late at the shop." It was easy to talk about the shop with perfect unreserve after such a performance as that.

"Oh dear ! we are so sorry for you !" Thus the two girls. And concurrence comes in various forms from Vereker, Fenwick, and the pianist, whom we haven't mentioned before. He was a cousin of Miss Wilson's, and was one of those unfortunate young men who have no individuality whatever. But pianists have to be human unless you can afford a pianola. You may speak of them as Mr. What's-his-name, or Miss Thingummy, but you must give them tea or coffee or cake or sandwiches, or whatever is brought in on a tray. This young man's name, we believe, was Elsley—Nobody Elsley, Miss Sally in her frivolity had thought fit to christen him. You know how in your own life people come in and go out, and you never know anything about them. Even so this young man in this story.

"I was very sorry for myself, I assure you"—it is Bradshaw who speaks—"when I had to make up my mind to give it up. But it couldn't be helped !" He speaks without reserve, but as of an unbearable subject ; in fact, Sally said afterwards to Tishy, "It seemed as if he was going to cry." He doesn't cry, though, but goes on : "At one time I really thought I should have gone and jumped into the river."

"Why didn't you ?" asks Sally. "I should have."

"Yes, silly Sally !" says Lætitia ; "and then you would have swum like a fish. And the police would have pulled you out. And you would have looked ridiculous !"

But Sally is off on a visit to her mother in the next room.

"Tired, mammy darling ?"

She kisses her, and her mother answers : "Yes, love, a little," and kisses her back.

"Doesn't he play *beautifully*, mother ?" says Sally.

But her mother says "Yes" absently. Her attention is taken off by something else. What is wrong with Mr. Fenwick ? Sally doesn't think anything is. It's only his way.

"I'm sure there's something wrong," says Mrs. Nightingale, and gets up to go into the front-room rather wearily. "I shall go to bed soon, poppet," she says, "and leave you to do the honours. Is anything wrong, doctor ?" She speaks under her



voice to Vereker, looking very slightly round at Fenwick, who, after the movement that alarmed her—a rather unusually marked head-shake and pressure of his hands on his eyes—is standing looking down at the fire, on the rug with his back to her, as she speaks to Vereker.

“I fancy he’s had what he calls a recurrence,” says the doctor. “Nothing to hurt. These half-recollections will go on until the memory comes back in earnest. It may some time.”

“Are you talking about me, doctor?” His attention may have been caught by a reflection in a glass before him. “Yes, it was a very queer recurrence. Something about lawn-tennis. Only it had to do with what Miss Wilson said about the police fishing Sally out of the water.” He looks round for Miss Wilson, but she is at the other end of the room on a sofa, talking to Bradshaw about the Strad, as recorded once before. Sally testifies :

“Tishy said it wouldn’t work—trying to drown yourself if you could swim. No more it would.”

“But why should that make me think of lawn-tennis? It did.” He looks seriously distressed by it—can make nothing out.

“Kitten,” says Sally’s mother to her suddenly, “I think I shall go away to bed. I’m feeling very tired.”

She says good-night comprehensively, and departs. But she is so clearly the worse for something that her daughter follows her to see that the something is not serious. Outside she reassures Sally, who returns. Oh no, she is only tired; really nothing else.

But what drove her out of the room was a feeling that she must be alone and silent. Could her position be borne at all? Yes, with patience and self-control. But that “Why should it make me think of lawn-tennis?” was trying. Not only the pain of still more revived association, but the fear that his memory might travel still further into the past. It was living on the edge of the volcano.

Her own memory had followed on, too, taking up the thread of that old interview in the garden of twenty years ago. She had felt again the clasp of his arm, the touch of his hand; had heard his voice of passionate protest—protest against the idea that he could ever forget. And she had then pretended to make a half-joke of his earnestness. What would he do now, really, if she were to tell him she preferred his great friend

Arthur Fenwick to him? That was nonsense, he said. She knew she didn't. Besides, Arthur wanted Jessie Nairn. Why, didn't they waltz all the waltzes at the party last week?... Well, so did we, for that matter, all-but.... And just look how they had run away together! Wasn't that them coming back? Yes, it was; and artificial calm ensued, and more self-contained manners. But then, before the other two young lovers could rejoin them, she had time for a word more.

"No, dear Gerry, seriously. If I were to write out *no* to you in India—a great big final NO—then what do you think you would do?"

"I know what I *think* I should do. I should throw myself into the Hooghly or the Ganges."

"You silly boy! You would swim about, whether you liked or no. And then Jemadars, or Shastras, or Sudras, or something would come and pull you out. And then how ridiculous you would look!"

"No, Rosey, because I can't swim. Isn't it funny?"

Then she recollected *his* friend's voice striking in with: "What's that? Gerry Palliser swim! Of course he can't. He can wrestle, or run, or ride, or jump; and he's the best man I know with the gloves on. But swim he *can't*! That's flat!" Also how Gerry had then told eagerly how he was nearly drowned once, and Arthur fished him up from the bottom of Abingdon Lock. The latter went on:

"It was after that we tattooed each other, his name on my arm, my name on his, so as not to quarrel. You know, I suppose, that men who tattoo each other's arms can't quarrel if they try?" Arthur showed "A. Palliser," tattooed blue on his arm. Both young men were very grave and earnest about the safeguard. And then she remembered a question she asked, and how both replied with perfect gravity: "Of course, sure to!" The question had been:—Was it invariable that all men quarrelled if one saved the other from drowning?

She sits upstairs alone by the fire in her bedroom, and dreams again through all the past, except the nightmare of her life—that she always shudders away from. Sally will come up presently, and then she will feel ease again. Now, it is a struggle against fever.

She can hear plainly enough—for the house is but a London suburban villa—the strains from the drawing-room of what is

possibly the most hackneyed violin music in the world—the Tartini (so-called) Devil Sonata—every phrase, every run, every chord an enthralling mystery still, an utterance none can explain, an inexhaustible thing no age can wither, and no custom stale. It is so soothing to her that it matters little if it makes them late. But that young man will destroy his nerves to a certainty outright.

Then comes the chaos of dispersal—the broken fragments of the intelligible a watchful ear may pick out. Dr. Vereker won't have a cab; he will leave the 'cello till next time, and walk. Mr. Bradshaw wants to get to Bayswater. Of course, that's all in our way—we being Miss Wilson and the cousin, the nonentity. We can give Mr. Bradshaw a lift as far as he goes, and then he can take the growler on. Then more good-nights are wished than the nature of things will admit of before to-morrow, Fenwick and Vereker light something to smoke, with a preposterous solicitude to use only one tandsticker between them, and walk away umbrella-less. From which we see that "it" is holding up. Then comes silence, and a consciousness of a policeman musing, and suspecting doors have been left stood open.

And it was then Sally went upstairs and indicted her friend for sitting on that sofa after calling him a shop-boy. And she didn't forget it, either, for after she and her mother were in bed, and presumably better, she called out to her:

"I say, mammy!"

"What, dear?"

"Isn't that St. John's Church?"

"Isn't which St. John's Church?"

"Where Tishy goes?"

"Yes, Ladbroke Grove Road. Why?"

"Because now Mr. Bradshaw will go there—public worship!"

"Will he, dear? Suppose we go to sleep." But she really meant "you," not "we"; for it was a long time before she went to sleep herself. She had plenty to think of, and wanted to be quiet, conscious of Sally in the neighbourhood.

We hope our reader was not misled, as we ourselves were, when Mrs. Nightingale first saw the name on Fenwick's arm, into supposing that she accepted it as his real name. She knew better. But then, how was she to tell him his name was Paliser? Think it over.



## CHAPTER XIII

WAS it possible, thought Rosalind in the sleepless night that followed, that the recurrence of the tennis-garden in Fenwick's mind might grow and grow, and be a nucleus round which the whole memory of his life might reform? Even so she had seen, at a chemical lecture, a supersaturated solution, translucent and spotless, suddenly fill with innumerable ramifications from one tiny crystal dropped into it. Might not this shred of memory chance to be a crystal of the right salt in the solvent of his mind, and set going a swift arborescence to penetrate the whole? Might not one branch of that tree be a terrible branch—one whose leaves and fruit were poisoned and whose stem was clothed with thorns? A hideous metaphor of the moment—call it the worst in her life—when her young husband, driven mad with the knowledge that had just forced its way into his reluctant mind, had almost struck her away from him, and with angry words, of which the least was traitress, had broken through the effort of her hands to hold him, and left her speechless in her despair.

It was such a nightmare idea, this anticipation that next time she met Gerry's eyes she might see again the anger that was in them on that blackest of her few married days, might see him again vanish from her, this time never to return. And it spread an ever-growing horror, greater and greater in the silence and the darkness of the night, till it filled all space and became a power that thrilled through every nerve, and denied the right of any other thing in the infinite void to be known or thought of. Which of us has not been left, with no protection but our own weak resolutions, to the mercy of a dominant idea in the still hours when others were near us sleeping, whom we might not wake to say one word to save us?

What would his face be like—how would his voice sound—when she saw him next? Or would some short and cruel letter

come to say he had remembered all, and now—for all the gratitude he owed her—he could not bear to look upon her face again, hers who had done him such a wrong? If so, what should she—what could she do?

There was only one counter-thought to this that brought with it a momentary balm. She would send Sally to him to beg, beseech, implore him not to repeat his headstrong error of the old years, to swear to him that if only he could know all he would forgive—nay, more, that if he could know quite all—the very whole of the sad story—not only would he forgive, but rather seek forgiveness for himself for the too harsh judgment he so rashly formed.

What should she say to Sally? how should she instruct her to plead for her? Never mind that now. All she wanted in her lonely, nervous delirium was the ease the thought gave her, the mere thought of the force of Sally's fixed, immovable belief—that she was certain of—that whatsoever her mother had done was right. Never mind the exact amount of revelation she would have to make to Sally. She might surely indulge the idea, just to get at peace somehow, till—as pray Heaven it might turn out—she should know that Gerry's mind was still unconscious of its past. The chances were, so she thought mechanically to herself, that all her alarms were groundless.

And at the first—strange as it is to tell—Sally's identity was only that of the daughter she had now, that filled her life, and gave her the heart to live. She was the Sally space was full of for her. *What* she was, and *why* she was, merged, as it usually did, in the broad fact of her existence. But there was always the chance that this *what* and *why*—two bewildering imps—should flaunt their unsolved conundrum through her mother's baffled mind. There they were, sure enough in the end, enjoying her inability to answer, dragging all she prayed daily to be better able to forget out into the light of the memory they had kindled. There they were, chuckling over her misery, and hiding—so Rosalind feared—a worse question than any, keeping it back for a final stroke to bring her mental fever to its height—how could Sally be the daughter of a devil and her soul be free from the taint of his damnation?

If Rosalind had only been well read in the mediæval classics, and had known that story of Merlin's birth—the Nativity that was to rewrite the Galilean story in letters of Hell, and give mankind for ever to be the thrall of the fallen angel his father!

And how the babe at its birth was snatched away to the waters of baptism, and poor Satan—alas!—obliged to cast about for some new plan of campaign; which, to say truth, he must have found, and practised with some success. But Rosalind had never read this story. Had she done so she might have felt, as we do, that the tears of an absolutely blameless mother might serve to cleanse the inherited sin from a babe unborn as surely as the sacramental fount itself.

And it may be that some such thought had woven itself into the story Fenwick's imagination framed for Rosalind the evening before—that time that she said of Sally, "She is not a devil!" The exact truth, the ever-present record that was in her mind as she said this, must remain unknown to us.

But to return to her as she is now, racked by a twofold mental fever, an apprehension of a return of Fenwick's memory, and a stimulated recrudescence of her own; with the pain of all the scars burnt in twenty years ago revived now by her talk with him of a few hours since. She could bear it no longer, there alone in the darkness of the night. She *must* get at Sally, if only to look at her. Why, that child never could be got to wake unless shaken when she was wanted. Ten to one she wouldn't this time. And it would make all the difference just to see her there, alive and leagues away in dreamland. If her sleep lasted through the crackle of a match to light her candle, heard through the open door between their rooms, the light of the candle itself wouldn't wake her. Rosalind remembered as she lit the candle and found her dressing-gown—for the night air struck cold—how once, when a ten-year-old, Sally had locked herself in, and no noise or knocking would rouse her; how she herself, alarmed for the child, had thereon summoned help, and the door was broken open, but only to be greeted by the sleeper, after explanation, with, "Why didn't you knock?"

She was right in her forecast, and perhaps it was as well the girl did not wake. She would only have had a needless fright, to see her mother, haggard with self-torment, by her bedside at that hour. So Rosalind got her full look at the rich coils of black hair that framed up the unconscious face, that for all its unconsciousness had on it the contentment of an amused dreamer; at the white ivory skin it set off so well; at the one visible ear that heard nothing, or if it did, translated it into dream, and the faint rhythmic movement that vouched for soundless breath. She looked as long as she dared, then moved away.



But she had barely got her head back on her pillow when "Was that you, mother?" came from the next room. Her mother always said of Sally that nothing was certain but the *imprévu*, and ascribed to her a monstrous perversity. It was this that caused her to sleep profoundly through that most awakening of incidents, a person determined not to disturb you, and then to wake up short into that person's self-congratulations on success.

"Of course it was, darling. Who else could it have been?"

Sally's reply, "I thought it was," seems less reasonable—mere conversation-making—and a sequel as of one reviewing new and more comfortable positions in bed follows naturally. A decision on the point does not prohibit conversation, rather facilitates it.

"What did you come for, mammy?"

"Eau-de-Cologne." The voice has a fell intention of instant sleep in it which Sally takes no notice of.

"Have you got it?"

"Got it? Yes. Go to sleep, chatterbox."

It was true about the eau-de-Cologne, for Rosalind, with a self-acting instinct that explanation might be called for, had picked up the bottle on her return journey. You see, she was always practising wicked deceits and falsehoods, all to save that little chit being made miserable on her account. But the chit wasn't going to sleep again. She was going to enjoy her new attitude awake. Who woke her up? Answer that.

"I say, mother!"

"What, kitten? Go to sleep."

"All right—in a minute. Do you remember Mr. Fenwick's bottle of eau-de-Cologne?"

"Of course I do. Go to sleep."

"Just going. But wasn't it funny?"

"What funny?—Oh, the eau-de-Cologne!"

Rosalind isn't really sleepy, and may as well talk. "Yes, that was very funny. I wonder where he got it." She seems roused, and her daughter is repentant.

"Oh dear! What a shame! I've just spoiled your go-off. Poor mother!"

"Never mind, chick! I like to talk a little. It *was* funny that he should have a big bottle of eau-de-Cologne, of all things, in his pocket."

"Yes, but it was rummer still about Rosalind Nightingale—

his Rosalind Nightingale, the one he knew." This is dangerous ground, and Rosalind knows it. But a plea of half-sleep will cover mistakes, and conversation about the pre-electrocution period is the nearest approach to taking Sally into her confidence that she can hope for. She is so weary with her hours of wakefulness that she becomes a little reckless, foreseeing a resource in such uncertainty of speech as may easily be ascribed to a premature dream.

"It's not *impossible* that it should have been your grandmother, kitten. But we can't find out now. And it wouldn't do us any good that I can see."

"It would be nice to know for curiosity. Couldn't anything be fished out in the granny connexion? No documents?"

"Nothing will ever be fished out by me in that connexion, Sally darling." Sally knows from her mother's tone of voice that they are approaching an *impasse*. She means to give up the point the moment it comes fully in view. But she will go on until that happens. She has to think out what was the name of the Sub-Dean before she speaks again.

"Didn't the Reverend Decimus Ireson grab all the belongings?"

"They were left to him, child. It was all fair, as far as that goes. I didn't grudge him the things—indeed, I felt rather grateful to him for taking them. It would only have been painful, going over them. Different people feel differently about these things. I didn't want old recollections."

"Hadn't the Reverend Decimus a swarm of brats?"

"Sal—ly *darling*! . . . Well, yes, he had. There were two families. One of six daughters, I forget which."

"Couldn't they be got at, to see if they wouldn't recollect something?"

"Of course they could. They've married a lawyer—at least, one of them has. And all the rest, I believe, live with them." At another time Sally would have examined this case in relation to the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. She was too interested now to stop her mother continuing: "But what a silly chick you are! Why should *they* know anything about it?"

"Why shouldn't they?"

Her mother's reply is emphasised. "My dear, do consider! I was with your grandmother till within a month of her marriage with the Reverend, as you call him, and I should have been ten times more likely to hear about Mr. Fenwick than ever they

would afterwards. Your grandmother had never even seen them when I went away to India to be married."

"What's the lawyer's name?"

"Bearman, I think, or Dearman. But why? — Oh no, by-the-bye, I think it's Beazley."

"Because I could write and ask, or call. Sure to hear something."

"My dear, you'll hear nothing, and they'll only think you mad." Rosalind was beginning to feel that she had made a mistake. She did not feel so sure Sally would hear nothing. A recollection crossed her mind of how one of the few incidents there was time for in her short married life had been the writing of a letter by her husband to his friend, the real Fenwick, and of much chaff therein about the eldest of these very daughters, and her powerful rivalry to Jessie Nairn. It came back to her now. Sally alarmed her still further.

"Yes, mother. I shall just get Mr. Fenwick to hunt up the address, and go and call on the Beazleys." This sudden assumption of a concrete form by the family was due to a vivid image that filled Sally's active brain immediately of a household of parched women presided over by a dried man who owned a wig on a stand and knew what chaff-wax meant, which she didn't. A shop window near Lincoln's Inn was responsible. But to Rosalind it really seemed that Sally must have had other means of studying this family, and she was frightened.

"You don't know them, kitten?"

"Not the least. Don't want to." This reflection suggests caution. "Perhaps I'd better write. . . ."

"Better do nothing of the sort, child. Better go to sleep. . . ."

"All right." But Sally does not like quitting the subject so abruptly, and enlarges on it a little more. She sketches out a letter to be written to the lady who is at present a buffer-state between the dried man and the parched women. "Dear madam," she recites, "you may perhaps recall—or will perhaps recall—which is right, mother?"

"Either, dear. Go to sleep." But just at this moment Rosalind recollects with satisfaction that the name was neither Beazley nor Dearman, but Tressilian Tredgold. She has been thinking of falling back on affectation of sleep to avoid more alarms, but this makes it needless.

"I'm sure I've got the name wrong," she says, with revived wakefulness in her voice.



But Sally is murmuring to herself—"Perhaps recall my mother, Mrs. Rosalind Nightingale—Rosalind in brackets—by her maiden name of—by the same name—who married the late Mr. Graythorpe in India—I say, mother. . . ."

"Yes, little goose."

"How am I to put all that?"

"Go to sleep! I don't think you'll find that family very—coming. My impression is you had much better leave it alone. What good would it do you to find out who Mr. Fenwick was? And perhaps have him go away to Australia!"

"Why Australia?"

Oh dear, what mistakes Rosalind did make! Why on earth need she name the place she knew Gerry did go to? America would have done just as well.

"Australia—New Zealand—America—anywhere!" But Sally doesn't mind—has fallen back on her letter-sketch.

"Apologising for troubling you, believe me, dear madam, yours faithfully—or very faithfully, or truly—Rosalind Nightingale. . . . No; I should not like Mr. Fenwick to go away anywhere. No more would you. I want him here, for us. So do you!"

"I should be very sorry indeed for Mr. Fenwick to go away. We should miss him badly. But fancy what his wife must be feeling, if he has one. I can sympathise with her." It really was a relief to say anything so intensely true.

Did the reality with which she spoke impress Sally more than the mere words, which were no more than "common form" of conversation? Probably, for something in them brought back her conference with the Major on Boxing-Day morning when her mother was at church. What was that she had said to him when she was sitting on his knee improving his whiskers?—that if she, later on, saw reason to suppose his suspicions true, she would ask her mother point-blank. Why not? And here she was with the same suspicions, quite, quite independent of the Major. And see how dark it was in both rooms! One could say anything. Besides, if her mother didn't want to answer, she could pretend to be asleep. She wouldn't ask too loud, to give her a chance.

"Mother darling, if Mr. Fenwick was to make you an offer, how should you like it?"

"Oh dear! *what's* the child saying? What is it, Sallykin? I was just going off."

Now, obviously, you can ask a lady Sally's question in the easy course of flowing chat, but you can't drag her from the golden gates of sleep to ask it. It gets too official. So Sally backed out, and said she had said nothing, which wasn't the case. The excessive readiness with which her mother accepted the statement looks, to us, as if she had really been awake and heard.

## CHAPTER XIV

IN spite of Colonel Lund's having been so betimes in his forecastings about Mrs. Nightingale and Fenwick (as we must go on calling him for the present), still, when one day that lady came, about six weeks after the nocturne in our last chapter, and told him she must have his consent to a step she was contemplating before she took it, he felt a little shock in his heart—one of those shocks one so often feels when one hears that a thing he has anticipated without pain, even with pleasure, is to become actual.

But he replied at once, "My dear! Of course!" without hearing any particulars; and added: "You will be happier, I am sure. Why should I refuse my consent to your marrying Fenwick? Because that's it, I suppose?" That was it. The Major had guessed right.

"He asked me to marry him, last night," she said, with simple equanimity and directness. "I told him yes, as far as my own wishes went. But I said I wouldn't, if either you or the kitten forbade the banns."

"I don't think we shall, either of us." It was a daughter's marriage-warrant he was being asked to sign; a document seldom signed without a heartache, more or less, for him who holds the pen. But his *cœur navré* had to be concealed, for the sake of the applicant; no wet blanket should be cast on her new happiness. He kissed her affectionately. To him, for all her thirty-nine or forty birthdays, she was still the young girl he had helped and shielded in her despair, twenty years ago, he himself being then a widower, near forty years her senior. "No, Rosa dear," continued the Major. "As far as I can see, there can be no objection but one—you know!"

"The one?"

"Yes. It is all a *terra incognita*. He may have a wife elsewhere, seeking for him. Who can tell?"



"It is a risk to be run. But I am prepared to run it"—she was going to add "for his sake," but remembered that her real meaning for these words would be, "for the sake of the man I wronged," and that the Major knew nothing of Fenwick's identity. She had not been able to persuade herself to make even her old friend her confidant. Danger lay that way. She *knew* silence would be safe against anything but Fenwick's own memory.

"Yes, it is a risk, no doubt," the Major said. "But I am like him. I cannot conceive a man forgetting that he had a wife. It seems an impossibility. He has talked about you to me, you know."

"In connexion with his intention about me?"

"Almost. Not quite definitely, but almost. He knew I understood what he meant. It seemed to me he was fidgeting more about his having so little to offer in the way of worldly goods than about any possible wife in the clouds."

"Dear fellow! Just fancy! Why, those people in the City would take him into partnership to-morrow if he had a little capital to bring in. They told him so themselves."

"And you would finance him? Is that the idea? Well, I suppose as I'm your trustee, if the money was all lost, I should have to make it up, so it wouldn't matter."

"Oh, Major dear! is *that* what being a trustee means?"

"Of course, my dear Rosa! What did you think it meant?"

"Do you know, I don't know what I *did* think; at least, I thought it would be very nice if you were my trustee."

The conversation has gone off on a siding, but the Major shunts the train back. "That was what you and little fiddle-stick's-end were talking about till three in the morning, then?"

"Oh, Major dear, did you hear us? And we kept you awake? What a *shame*!"

For on the previous evening, Sally being out musicking and expected home late, Fenwick and Mrs. Nightingale had gone out in the back-garden to enjoy the sweet air of that rare phenomenon—a really fine spring night in England—leaving the Major indoors because of his bronchial tubes. The late seventies shrink from night air, even when one means to be a healthy octogenarian. Also, they go away to bed, secretively, when no one is looking—at least, the Major did in this case. Of course, he was staying the night, as usual.

So, in the interim between the Major's good-night and Sally's cab-wheels, this elderly couple of lovers (as they would have worded their own description) had the summer night to themselves. As the Major closed his bedroom window, he saw, before drawing down the blind, that the two were walking slowly up and down the gravel path, talking earnestly. No impression of mature years came to the Major from that gravel path. A well-made, handsome man, with a bush of brown hair and a Raleigh beard, and a graceful woman suggesting her beauty through the clear moonlight—that was the implication of as much as he could see, as he drew the inference a word of soliloquy hinted at, "Not Millais' Huguenot, so far!" But he evidently expected that grouping very soon. Only he was too sleepy to watch for it, and went to bed. Besides, would it have been honourable?

"It's no use, Fenwick," she said to him in the garden, "trying to keep off the forbidden subject, so I won't try."

"It's not forbidden by me. Nothing could be, that *you* would like to say."

Was that, she thought, only what so many men say every day to so many women, and mean so little by? Or was it more? She could not be sure yet. She glanced at him as they turned at the path-end, and her misgivings all but vanished, so serious and resolved was his quiet face in the moonlight. She was half-minded to say to him, "Do you mean that you love me, Fenwick?" But then, was it safe to presume on the peculiarity of her position, of which he, remember, knew absolutely nothing.

For with her it was not as with another woman, who expects what is briefly called "an offer." In *her* case, the man beside her was her husband, to whose exorcism of her love from his life her heart had never assented. While, in his eyes, she differed in no way in her relation to him from any woman, to whom a man, placed as he was, longs to say that she is what he wants most of all mortal things, but stickles in the telling of it, from sheer cowardice; who dares not risk the loss of what share he has in her in the attempt to get the whole. *She* grasped the whole position, *he* only part of it.

"I am glad it is so," she decided to say. "Because each time I see you, I want to ask if nothing has come back—no trace of memory?"

"Nothing! It is all gone. Nothing comes back."

"Do you remember that about the tennis-court. Did it go any further, or die out completely?"



He stopped a moment in his walk, and flicked the ash from his cigar ; then, after a moment's thought, replied :

" I am not sure. It seemed to get mixed with my name—on my arm. I think it was only because tennis and Fenwick are a little alike." His companion thought how near the edge of a volcano both were, and resolved to try a crucial experiment. Better an eruption, after all, or a plunge in the crater, than a life of incessant doubt.

" You remembered the name Algernon clearly ?"

" Not *clearly*. But it was the only name with an ' A ' that felt right. Unless it was Arthur, but I'm sure my name never was Arthur !"

" Sally thought it was hypnotic suggestion—thought I had laid an unfair stress upon it. I easily might have."

" Why ? Did you know an Algernon ?"

" My husband's name was Algernon." She herself wondered how any voice that spoke so near a heart that beat as hers did at this moment could keep its secret. Yet it betrayed nothing, and so supreme was her self-control that she could say to herself, even while she knew she would pay for this effort later, that the pallor of her face would betray nothing either ; he would put that down to the moonlight. She *was* a strong woman. For she went steadily on, to convince herself of her own self-command : " I knew him very little by that name, though. I always called him Gerry."

He merely repeated the name thrice, but it gave her a moment of keen apprehension. Any stirring of memory over it might be the thin end of a very big wedge. But if there was any, it was an end so thin that it broke off. Fenwick looked round at her.

" Do you know," he said, " I rather favour the hypnotic suggestion theory. For the moment you said the name Gerry, I fancied I too knew it as the short for Algernon. Now, that's absurd ! No two people ever made Gerry out of Algernon. It's always Algy."

" Always. Certainly, it would be odd."

" I am rather inclined to think," said Fenwick, after a short silence, " that I can understand how it happened. Only then, perhaps, my name may not be Algernon at all. And here I have been using it, signing with it, and so on."

" What do you understand ?"

" Well, I suspect this. I suspect that you did lay some kind of stress, naturally, on your husband's name, and also on its



abbreviation. It affected me somehow with a sense of familiarity."

"Is it so *very* improbable that you were familiar with the name Gerry too? It might be——"

"Anything might be. But surely we almost know that two accidental adoptions of Gerry as a short for Algernon would not come across each other by chance, as yours and mine have done."

"What is 'almost knowing'? But tell me this. When I call you Gerry—Gerry . . . there!—does the association or impression repeat itself?" She repeated the name once and again, to try. There was a good deal of nettle-grasping in all this. Also a wish to clinch matters, to drive the sword to the hilt; to put an end, once and for all, to the state of tension she lived in. For surely, if anything could prove his memory was really gone, it would be this. That she should call him by his name of twenty years ago—should utter it to him, as she could not help doing, in the tone in which she spoke to him then, and that her doing so should arouse no memory of the past—surely this would show, if anything could show it, that that past had been finally erased from the scroll of his life. She had a moment only of suspense after speaking, and then, as his voice came in answer, she breathed again freely. Nothing could have shown a more complete unconsciousness than his reply, after another moment of reflection:

"Do you know, Mrs. Nightingale, that convinces me that the name Algernon *was* produced by your way of saying it. It *was* hypnotic suggestion! I assure you that, however strange you may think it, every time you repeat the name Gerry, it seems more familiar to me. If you said it often enough, I have no doubt I should soon be believing in the diminutive as devoutly as I believe in the name itself. Because I am quite convinced of Algernon Fenwick. Continually signing *per-pro*'s has driven it home." He didn't seem quite in earnest over his conviction, though—seemed to laugh a little about it.

But a sadder tone came into his voice after an interval in which his companion, frightened at her own temerity, resolved that she would not call him Gerry again. It was sailing too near the wind. She was glad he went back from this side-channel of their talk to the main subject.

"No, I have no hope of getting to the past through my own mind. I feel it is silence. And that being so, I should be sorry that any illumination should come to me out of the past,

throwing light on records my mind could not read—I mean, any proof positive of what my crippled memory could not confirm. I would rather remain quite in the dark—unless, indeed——”

“ Unless what ? ”

“ Unless the well-being of some others, forgotten with my forgotten world, is involved in—dependent on—my return to it. That would be shocking—the hungry nestlings in the deserted nest. But I am so convinced that I have only forgotten a restless life of rapid change—that I *could* not forget love and home, if I ever had them—that my misgivings about this are misgivings of the reason only, not of the heart. Do you understand me ? ”

“ Perfectly. At least, I think so. Go on.”

“ I cannot help thinking, too, that a sense of a strong link with a forgotten yesterday would survive the complete effacement of all its details in the form of a wish to return to it. I have none. My to-day is too happy for me to wish to go back to that yesterday, even if I could, without a wrench. I feel a sort of shame in saying I should be sorry to return to it. It seems a sort of . . . a sort of disloyalty to the unknown.”

“ You might long to be back, if you could know. Think if you could see before you now, and recognise the woman who was once your wife.” There was nettle-grasping in this.

“ It is a mere abstract idea,” he replied, “ unaccompanied by any image of an individual. I perceive that it is dutiful to recognise the fact that I should welcome her *if* she appeared as a reality. But it is a large *if*. I am content to go on without an hypothesis—that is really all she is now. And my belief that, if she had ever existed, I should not be *able* to disbelieve in her, underlies my acceptance of her in that character.”

Mrs. Nightingale laughed. “ We are mighty metaphysical,” said she. “ Wouldn’t it depend entirely on what she was like, when all’s said and done ? I believe I’m right. We women are more practical than men, after all.”

“ You make game of my metaphysics, as you call them. Well, I’ll drop the metaphysics and speak the honest truth.” He stopped and faced round towards her, standing on the garden path. “ Only, you must make me one promise.”

She stopped also, and stood looking full at him.

“ What promise ? ”

“ If I tell you all I think in my heart, you will not allow it to come between me and you, to undermine the only strong friendship I have in the world, the only one I know of.”



"It shall make no difference between us. You may trust me."

They turned and walked again slowly, once up and down. Then Fenwick's voice, when he next spoke, had an added earnestness, a growing tension, with an echo in it, for her, of the years gone by—a ring of his young enthusiasm, of his passionate outburst in the lawn-tennis garden twenty years ago. He made no more ado of what he had to say.

"I can form no image in my mind, try how I may, of any woman for whose sake I would give up one hour of the precious privilege I now enjoy. I have no right to—to assess it, to make a definition of it. But I *have* it now. I could not resume my place as the husband of a now unknown wife—you know what I mean—and not lose the privilege of being near *you*. It may be—it is conceivable, I mean; no more—that a revelation to me of myself, a light thrown on what I am, would bring me what would palliate the wrench of losing what I have of you. It *may* be so—it *may* be! All I know is—all I can say is—that I can now *imagine* nothing, no treasure of love of wife or daughter, that would be a make-weight for what I should lose if I had to part from you." He paused a moment, as though he thought he was going beyond his rights of speech, then added more quietly: "No; I can imagine *no* hypothetical wife. And as for my hypothetical daughter, I find I am always utilising Sally for her."

Mrs. Nightingale murmured in an undertone the word "Sallykin," as she so often did when her daughter was mentioned, with that sort of caress in her voice. This time it was caught by a sort of gasp, and she remained silent. What Sally *was* had crossed her mind—the strange relation in which she stood to Fenwick, born in *his* wedlock, but no daughter of his. And there he was, as fond of the child as he could be.

Fenwick may have half misunderstood something in her manner, for when he spoke again his words had a certain aspect of recoil from what he had said, at least of consideration of it in some new light.

"When I speak to you as freely as this, remember the nature of the claim I have to do so—the only apology I can make for taking an exceptional licence."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean I do not count myself as a man—only a sort of inexplicable waif, a kind of cancelled man. A man without a



past is like a child, or an idiot from birth, suddenly endowed with faculties."

"What nonsense, Fenwick! You have brooded and speculated over your condition until you have become morbid. Do now, as Sally would say, chuck the metaphysics."

"Perhaps I was getting too sententious over it. I'm sorry, and please I won't do so any more."

"Don't, then. And now you'll see what will happen. You will remember everything quite suddenly. It will all come back in a flash, and, oh, how glad you will be! And think of the joy of your wife and children!"

"Yes, and suppose all the while I am hating them for dragging me away from you——"

"From me and Sally?"

"I wasn't going to say Sally, but I don't want to keep her out. You and Sally, if you like. All I know is, if their reappearance were to bring with it a pleasure I cannot imagine—because I cannot imagine *them*—it would cut across my life, as it is now, in a way that would drive me *mad*. Indeed it would. How could I say to myself—as I say now, as I dare to say to you, knowing what I am—that to be here with you now is the greatest happiness of which I am capable?"

"All that would change if you recovered them."

"Yes—yes—maybe! But I shrink from it; I shrink from *them*! They are strangers—nonentities. You are—you are—oh, it's no use——" He stopped suddenly.

"What am I?"

"It's no use beating about the bush. You are the centre of my life as it is, you are what I—all that is left of me—love best in the world! I cannot *now* conceive the possibility of anything but hatred for what might come between us, for what might sever the existing link, whatever it may be—I care little what it is called, so long as I may keep it unbroken. . . ."

"And I care nothing!" It was her eyes meeting his that stopped him. He could read the meaning of her words in them before they were spoken. Then he replied in a voice less firm than before:

"Dare we—knowing what I am, knowing what may come suddenly, any hour of the day, out of the unknown—*dare* we call it love?" Perhaps in Fenwick's mind at this moment the predominant feeling was terror of the consequences to her that marriage with him might betray her into. It was much stronger

than any misgiving (although a little remained) of her feelings toward himself.

"What else can we call it? It is a good old word." She said this quite calmly, with a very happy face one could see the flush of pleasure and success on even in the moonlight, and there was no reluctance, no shrinking in her, from her share of the outcome the Major had not waited to see. "Millais' Huguenot" was complete. Rosalind Graythorpe, or Palliser, stood there again with her husband's arms round her—her husband of twenty years ago! And in that fact was the keynote of what there was of unusual—of unconventional, one might almost phrase it—in her way of receiving and requiting his declaration. It hardly need be said that *he* was unconscious of any such thing. A man whose soul is reeling with the intoxication of a new-found happiness is not overcritical about the exact movement of the hand that has put the cup to his lips.

The Huguenot arrangement might have gone on in the undisturbed moonlight till the chill of the morning came to break it up if a cab-wheel *crescendo* and a *strepitoso* peal at the bell had not announced Sally, who burst into the house and rushed into the drawing-room tumultuously, to be corrected back by a serious word from Ann, the door-opener, that Missis and Mr. Fenwick had stepped out in the garden. Ann's parade of her conviction that this was *en règle*, when no one said it wasn't, was suggestive in the highest degree. Professional perjury in a law-court could have not been more self-conscious. Probably Ann knew all about it, as well as cook. Sally saw nothing. She was too full of great events at Ladbroke Grove Road—the sort of events that are announced with a preliminary, What *do* you think, N or M? And then develop the engagement of O to P, or the jilting of Q by R.

There was just time for a dozen words between the components of the Millais group in the moonlight.

"Shall we tell Sally?" It was the Huguenot that asked the question.

"Not just this minute. Wait till I can think. Perhaps I'll tell her upstairs. Now say good-bye before the chick comes, and go." And the chick came on the scene just too late to criticise the *pose*.

"I say, mother!" this with the greatest *empressement* of which humanity and youth are capable. "I've got something I *must* tell you!"

"What is it, kitten?"

"Tishy's head-over-ears in love with the shop-boy!"

"Sh-sh-sh-shish! You noisy little monkey, do consider! The neighbours will hear every word you say." So they will, probably, as Miss Sally's voice is very penetrating, and rings musically clear in the summer night. Her attitude is that she doesn't care if they do.

"Besides, they're only cats! And *nobody* knows who Tishy is, or the shop-boy. I'll come down and tell you all about it."

"We're coming up, darling!" You see, Sally had manifested down into the garden from the landing of the stair, which was made of iron openwork you knocked flower-pots down and broke, and you had to have a new one—that, at least, is how Ann put it. On the stair-top Mrs. Nightingale stems the torrent of her daughter's revelation because it's so late and Mr. Fenwick must get away.

"You must tell him all about it another time."

"I don't know whether it's any concern of his."

"Taken scrupulous, are we, all of a sudden?" says Fenwick, laughing. "That cock won't fight, Miss Pussy! You'll have to tell me all about it when I come to-morrow. Good-night, Mrs. Nightingale." A sort of humorous formality in his voice makes Sally look from one to the other, but it leads to nothing. Sally goes to see Fenwick depart, and her mother goes upstairs with a candle. In a minute or so Sally pelts up the stairs, leaving Ann and the cook to thumbscrew on the shutter-panels of the street door, and make sure that housebreaker-baffling bells are susceptible.

"Do you know, mamma, I really *did* think—what do you think I thought?"

"What, darling?"

"I thought Mr. Fenwick was going to kiss me!" In fact, Fenwick had only just remembered in time that family privileges must stand over till after the revelation.

"Should you have minded if he had?"

"*Not a bit!* Why should *anybody* mind Mr. Fenwick kissing them? You wouldn't yourself—you know you wouldn't! Come now, mother!"

"I shouldn't distress myself, poppet!" But words are mere wind; the manner of them is everything, and the foreground of her mother's manner suggests a background to Sally. She



has smelt a rat, and suddenly fixes her eyes on a tell-tale countenance fraught with mysterious reserves.

“Mother, you *are* going to marry Mr. Fenwick !” No change of type could do justice to the emphasis with which Sally goes straight to the point. Italics throughout would be weak. Her mother smiles as she fondles her daughter’s excited face.

“I am, darling. So you may kiss him yourself when he comes to-morrow evening.”

And Tishy’s passion for the shop-boy had to stand over. But, as the Major had said, the mother and daughter talked till three in the morning—well, past two, anyhow !

## CHAPTER XV

THE segment of a circle of Society that did duty for a sphere, in the case of Mrs. Nightingale and Sally, was collectively surprised when it heard of the intended marriage of the former, having settled in its own mind that the latter was the magnet to Mr. Fenwick's lodestone. But each several individual that composed it had, it seemed, foreseen exactly what was going to happen, and had predicted it in language that could only have been wilfully mistaken by persons interested in proving that the speaker was not a prophet. Exceptional insight had been epidemic. The only wonder was (to the individual speaker) that Mrs. Nightingale had remained single so long, and the only other wonder was that none of the other cases had seen it. They had evidently only taken seership mildly.

Dr. Vereker had a good opportunity of studying omniscience of a malignant type in the very well marked case of his own mother. You may remember Sally's denunciation of her as an old hen that came wobbling down on you. When her son (in the simplicity of his heart) announced to her as a great and curious piece of news that Mr. Fenwick was going to marry Mrs. Nightingale, she did not even look up from her knitting to reply: "What did I say to you, Conny?" For his name was Conrad, as Sally had reported. His discretion was not on the alert on this occasion, for he incautiously asked, "When?"

The good lady laid down her knitting on her knees, and folded her hands, interlacing her fingers, which were fat, as far as they would go, and leaning back with closed eyes—eyes intended to remain closed during anticipated patience.

"Fancy asking me that!" said she.

"Well, but—hang it!—*when?*"

"Do not use profane language, Conrad, in your mother's presence. Can you really ask me, 'When?' Try and recollect!"

Conrad appeared to consider; but as he had to contend with

the problem of finding out when a thing had been said, the only clue to the nature of which was the date of its utterance, it was no great wonder that his cogitations ended in a shake of the head subdivided into its elements—shakes taken a brace at a time—and an expression of face as of one who whistles *sotto voce*. His questioner must have been looking between her eyelids, which wasn't playing fair ; for she indicted him on the spot, and pushed him, as it were, into the dock.

“*That*, I suppose, means that I speak untruth. Very well, my dear !” Resignation set in.

“Come, mother, I say, now ! Be a reasonable maternal parent. When did I say anybody spoke untruth ?”

“My dear, you *said* nothing. But if your father could have heard what you did *not* say, you know perfectly well, my dear Conrad, what he would have *thought*. Was he likely to sit by and hear me insulted ? Did he ever do so ?”

The doctor was writing letters at a desk-table that he used for miscellaneous correspondence as much as possible, in order that this very same mother of his should be left alone as little as possible. He ended a responsible letter, and directed it, and made it a thing of the past with a stamp on it in a little basket on the hall-table outside. Then he came back to his mother, and bestowed on her the kiss, or peck, of peace. It always made him uncomfortable when he had to go away to the hospital under the shadow of dissension at home.

“Well, mother dear, what was it you really did say about the Fenwick engagement ?”

“It would be more proper, my dear, to speak of it as the Nightingale engagement. You will say it is a matter of form, but . . .”

“All right. The Nightingale engagement. . . .”

“My dear ! So abrupt ! To your mother !”

“Well, dear mammy, what was it, really now ?” This cajolery took effect, and the Widow Vereker's soul softened. She resumed her knitting.

“If you don't remember what it was, dear, it doesn't matter.” The doctor saw that nothing short of complete concession would procure a tranquil sea.

“Of course, I remember perfectly well,” he said mendaciously. He knew that, left alone, his mother would supply a summary of what he remembered. She did so, with a bound.

“I said, my dear (and I am glad you recollect it, Conrad)—



I said from the very first, when Mr. Fenwick was living at Krakatoa—(it was all *quite* right, my dear. Do you think I don't know? A grown-up daughter and two servants!)—I said that anyone with eyes in their head could see. And has it turned out exactly as I expected, or has it not?"

"Exactly."

"Very well, dear. I'm glad you say so. Now, don't contradict me another time."

The close observer of the actual (whom we lay claim to be) has occasionally to report the apparently impossible. We do not suppose we shall be believed when we say that Mrs. Vereker added: "Besides, there was the Major."

Professor Sales Wilson, Lætitia's father, was *the* Professor Sales Wilson. Only, if you had seen that eminent scholar when he got outside his library by accident and wanted to get back, you wouldn't have thought he was *the* anybody, and would probably have likened him to a disestablished hermit-crab—in respect, that is, of such a one's desire to disappear into his shell, and that respect only. For no hermit-crab would ever cause an acquaintance to wonder why he should shave at all if he could do it no better than that; nor what he was talking to himself about so frequently; nor whether he polished his spectacles so long at a time to give the deep groove they were making across his nose a chance of filling up; nor whether he would be less bald if he rubbed his head less; nor what he had really got inside that overpowering phrenology of brow, and behind that aspect of chronic concentration. But about the retiring habits of both there could be no doubt.

He lived in his library, attired by nature in a dressing-gown and skull-cap. But from its secret recesses he issued manifestoes which shook classical Europe. He corrected versions, excerpted passages, disallowed authenticities, ascribed works to their true authors, and exposed the pretensions of sciolists with a vigour which ought to have finally dispersed that unhallowed class. Only it didn't, because they are a class incapable of shame, and will go on madly, even when they have been proved to be *mere*, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Perhaps they had secret information about the domestic circumstances of their destroyer, and didn't care. If Yamen had had private means of knowing that Vishnu was on uncomfortable terms with his wife, a corrected version of the whole Hindu mythology might have been necessary.

However, so far as can be conjectured, the image the world formed of the Professor was a sort of aggregate of Dr. Johnson, Bentley, Grotius, Mezzofanti, and a slight touch of, say Conington, to bring him well up to date. But so much of the first, that whenever the *raconteur* repeated one of the Professor's moderately bon-mots, he always put "sir" in—as, for instance, "A punster, sir, is a man who demoralises two meanings in one word;" or, "Should you call that fast life, sir? I should call it slow death." The *raconteur* was rather given to making use of him, and assigning to him *mots* which were not at all *bons*, because they only had the "sir" in them, and were otherwise meaningless. He was distressed, not without reason, when he heard that he had said to Max Müller, or some one of that calibre, "There is no such thing, sir, as the English language!" But he very seldom heard anything about himself, or anyone else; as he passed his life, as aforesaid, in his library, buried in the Phœnician Dictionary he hoped he might live to bring out. He had begun the fourth letter; but *we* don't know the Phœnician alphabet. Perhaps it has only four letters in it.

He came out of his library for meals, of course. But he took very little notice of anything that passed at the family board, and read nearly the whole time, occasionally saying something forcible to himself. Indeed, he never conversed with his family unless deprived of his book. This occurred on the occasion when Sally carried the momentous news of her mother's intended marriage to Ladbroke Grove Road, the second day after they had talked till two in the morning. Matrimony was canvassed and discussed in all its aspects, and the particular case riddled and sifted, and elucidated from every point of the compass, without the Professor being the least aware that anything unusual was afoot, until Grotefend got in the mayonnaise sauce.

"Take your master's book away, Jenkins," said the lady of the house. And Jenkins, the tender-hearted parlourmaid, allowed master to keep hold just to the end of the sentence. "Take it away, as I told you, and wipe that sauce off!"

Sally did so want to box that woman's ears—at least, she said so after. She was a great horny, overbearing woman, was Mrs. Sales Wilson, and Sally was frightened lest Lætitia should grow like her. Only, Tishy's teeth never *could* get as big as that! Nor wiggle.

The Professor, being deprived of his volume, seemed to awake compulsorily, and come out into a cold, unlearned world. But



he smiled amiably, and rubbed his hands round themselves rhythmically.

“Well, then !” said he. “Say it all again.”

“Say what, papa ?”

“All the chatter, of course.”

“What for, papa ?”

“For me to hear. Off we go ! *Who’s* going to be married ?”

“You see, he was listening all the time. *I* shouldn’t tell him, if *I* were you. Your father is really unendurable. And he gets worse.” Thus the lady of the house.

“What does your mother say ?” There is a shade of asperity in the Professor’s voice.

“Says you were listening all the time, papa. So you were !” This is from Lætitia’s younger sister, Theeny. Her name was Athene. Her brother Egerton called her “Gallows Athene”—an offensive perversion of the name of the lady she was called after. Her mother had carefully taught all her children contempt for their father from earliest childhood. But toleration of his weaknesses—etymology, and so on—had taken root in spite of her motherly care, and the Professor was on very good terms with his offspring. He negatived Theeny amiably.

“No, my dear, I was like Mrs. Cluppins. The voices were loud, and forced themselves upon my ear. But as you all spoke at once, I have no idea what anybody said. My question was conjectural—purely conjectural. *Is* anybody going to marry anybody ? *I* don’t know.”

“What is your father talking about over there ? *Is* he going to help that tongue or not ? Ask him.” For a peculiarity in this family was that the two heads of it always spoke to one another through an agent. So clearly was this understood that direct speech between them, on its rare occasions, was always ascribed by distant hearers to an outbreak of hostilities. If either speaker had addressed the other by name, the advent of the Sergeant-at-Arms would have been the next thing looked for. On this occasion Lætitia’s literal transmission of “*Are* you going to help the tongue or not, papa ?” recalled his wandering mind to his responsibilities. Sally’s liver-wing—she was the visitor—was pleading at his elbow for its complement of tongue.

But soon a four-inch space intervened between the lonely tongue-tip on the dish and what had once been, in military language, its base of operations. Everybody that took tongue had got tongue.



"Well, then, how about who's married whom?" Thus the Professor, resuming his hand-rubbing, and neglecting the leg of a fowl.

"Make your father eat his lunch, Lætitia. We *cannot* be late again this afternoon." Whereon every one ate too fast; and Sally felt very glad the Professor had given her such a big slice of tongue, as she knew she wouldn't have the courage to have a second supply, if offered, much less ask for it.

"Do you hear, papa? I'm to make you eat your lunch," says Lætitia; and her mother murmurs "That's right; make him," as though he were an anaconda in the snake-house, and her daughter a keeper who could go inside the cage. Lætitia then adds briefly that Mrs. Nightingale is going to marry Fenwick.

"Ha! Mercy on us!" says the Professor quite vaguely, and, even more so, adds: "Chicken—chicken—chicken—chicken—chicken!" Though what he says next is more intelligible, it is unfortunate and ill-chosen: "And who *is* Mrs. Nightingale?"

The sphinx is mobility itself compared with Mrs. Wilson's intense preservation of her *status quo*, the import of which is that the Professor's blunders are things of everyday occurrence—every minute, rather. She merely says to Europe, "You see," and leaves that continent to deal with the position. Sally, who always gets impatient with the Wilson family, except the Professor himself and Lætitia—though *she* is trying sometimes—now ignores Europe, and gets the offender into order on her own account.

"Why, Professor dear, don't you know Mrs. Nightingale's my mother? I'm Sally Nightingale, you know!"

"I'm not at all sure that I did, my dear. I think I thought you were Sally Something-else. My mind is very absent sometimes. You must forgive me. Sally Nightingale! To be sure!"

"Never mind, Professor dear!" But the Professor still looks vexed at his blunder. So Sally says in confirmation, "I've forgiven you. Shake hands!" And doesn't make matters much better, for her action seems unaccountable to the absent-minded one, who says, "Why?" first, and then, "Oh, ah, yes—I see. Shake hands, certainly!" On which the Sphinx, at the far end of the table, wondered whether the Ancient Phœnicians were rude, under her breath.

"I'm so absent, Sally Nightingale, that I didn't even know your father wasn't living." Lætitia looks uncomfortable, and when Sally merely says, "I never saw my father," thinks to her-

self what a very discreet girl Sally is. Naturally she supposes Sally to be a wise enough child to know something about her own father. But the Wilson family were not completely in the dark about an unsatisfactory "something queer" in Sally's extraction; so that she credits that unconscious young person with having steered herself skilfully out of shoal-waters; but she is not sure whether to class her achievement as intrepidity or cheek. She is wanted in the intelligence department before she can decide this point.

"Perhaps, if you try, Lætitia, you'll be able to make out whether your father is or is not going to eat his lunch."

But as this appeal of necessity causes the Professor to run the risk of choking himself before Lætitia has time to formulate an enquiry, she can fairly allow the matter to lapse, as far as she is concerned. The dragon, her mother—for that was how Sally spoke of the horny one—kept an eye firmly fixed on the unhappy honorary member of most learned societies, and gave the word of command, "Take away!" with such promptitude that Jenkins nearly carried off the plate from under his knife and fork as he placed them on it.

A citation from the Odyssey was received in stony silence by the dragon, who, however, remarked to her younger daughter that it was no use talking about Phineus and the Harpies, because they had to be at St. Pancras at 3.10, or lose the train. And perhaps, if the servants were to be called Harpies, your father would engage the next one himself. They were trouble enough now, without that.

Owing to all which, the reference to Sally's father got lost sight of; and she wasn't sorry, because Theeny, at any rate, wasn't wanted to know anything about him, whatever Lætitia and her mother knew or suspected.

But, as a matter of fact, Sally's declaration that she "never saw" him was neither discretion, nor intrepidity, nor cheek. It was simple Nature. She had always regarded her father as having been accessory to herself before the fact; also as having been, for some mysterious reason, unpopular—perhaps a *mauvais sujet*. But he was Ancient History now—had joined the Phœnicians. Why should *she* want to know? Her attitude of unenquiring acquiescence had been cultivated by her mother, and it is wonderful what a dominant influence from early babyhood can do. Sally seldom spoke of this mysterious father of hers in any other terms than those she has just used. She had never



had an opportunity of making his acquaintance—that was all. In some way, undefined, he had not behaved well to her mother; and naturally she sided with the latter. Once, and once only, her mother had said to her, “Sally darling, I don’t wish to talk about your father, but to forget him. I have forgiven him, because of you. Because—how could I have done without you, kitten?” And thereafter, as Sally’s curiosity was a feeble force when set against the possibility that its gratification might cause pain to her mother, she suppressed it easily.

But now and again little things would be said in her presence that would set her a-thinking—little things such as what the Professor has just said. She may easily have been abnormally sensitive on the point—made more prone to reflection than usual—by last night’s momentous announcement. Anyhow, she resolved to talk to Tishy about her parentage as soon as they should get back to the drawing-room, where they were practising. All the two hours they ought to have played in the morning Tishy would talk about nothing but Julius Bradshaw. And look how ridiculous it all was! Because she *did* call him “shop-boy”—you know she did—only six weeks ago. Sally didn’t see why *her* affairs shouldn’t have a turn now; and although she was quite aware that her friend wanted her to begin again where they had left off before lunch, she held out no helping hand, but gave the preference to her own thoughts.

“I suppose my father drank,” said Sally to Tishy.

“If you don’t know, dear, how should I?” said Tishy to Sally. And that did seem plausible, and made Sally the more reflective.

The holly-leaves were gone now that had been conducive to thought at Christmas in this same room when we heard the two girls count four so often, but Sally could pull an azalea flower to pieces over her cogitations, and did so, instead of tuning up forthwith. Lætitia was preoccupied—couldn’t take an interest in other people’s fathers, nor her own for that matter. She tuned up, though, and told Sally to look alive. But while Sally looks alive she backs into a conversation of the forenoon, and out of the pending discussion of Sally’s paternity. Their two preoccupations pull in opposite directions.

“You *will* remember not to say anything, won’t you, Sally dear? Do promise.”

“Say anything? Oh no; *I* shan’t say anything. I never do say things. What about?”



“ You know as well as I do, dear—about Julius Bradshaw.”

“ Of course I shan’t, Tishy. Except mother ; she doesn’t count. I say, Tishy !”

“ Well, dear. Do look alive. I’m all ready.”

“ All right. Don’t be in a hurry. I want to know whether you really think my father drank.”

“ Why should I, dear ? I never heard anything about him—at least, I never heard anything myself. Mamma heard something. Only I wasn’t to repeat it. Besides, it was nothing whatever to do with drink.” The moment Lætitia said this, she knew that she had lost her hold on her only resource against cross-examination. When the difficulty of concealing anything is thrown into the same scale with the pleasure of telling it, the featherweights of duty and previous resolutions kick the beam. Then you are sorry when it’s too late. Lætitia was, and could see her way to nothing but obeying the direction on her music, which was *attacca*. To her satisfaction, Sally came in promptly in the right place, and a first movement in B $\sharp$  went steadily through without a back-lash. There seemed a chance that Sally hadn’t caught the last remark, but, alas ! it vanished.

“ What was it, then, if it wasn’t drink ?” said she, exactly as if there had been no music at all. Lætitia once said of Sally that she was a horribly direct little Turk. She was very often—in this instance certainly.

“ I suppose it was the usual thing.” Twenty-four, of course, knew more than nineteen, and could speak to the point of what was and wasn’t usual in matters of this kind. But if Lætitia hoped that vagueness would shake hands with delicacy and that details could be lubricated away, she was reckoning without her Turk.

“ What *is* the usual thing ?”

“ Hadn’t we better go on to the fugue ? I don’t care for the next movement, and it’s easy——”

“ Not till you say what you mean by ‘ the usual thing ’.”

“ Well, dear, I suppose you know what half the divorce-cases are about ?”

“ *Tishy !*”

“ What, dear ?”

“ There was *no* divorce !”

“ How do you know, dear ?”

“ I *should* have known of it.”

“ How do you know that ?”

"You might go on for ever that way. Now, Tishy dear, do be kind and tell me what you heard and who said it. *I* should tell *you*. You *know* I should." This appeal produces concession.

"It was old Major Roper told mamma—with blue pockets under his eyes and red all over, creaks and wheezes when he speaks—do you know him?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want to. At least, I've just seen him at a distance. I could see he was purple. *Our* Major—Colonel Lund, you know—says he's a horrible old gossip, and you can't rely on a word he says. But what *did* he say?"

"Well, of course, I oughtn't to tell you this, because I promised not. What he *said* was that your mother went out to be married to your father in India, and the year after he got a divorce because he was jealous of some man your mother had met on the way out."

"How old was I?"

"Gracious me, child! how should *I* know? He only said you were a baby in arms. Of course, you must have been, if you think of it." Lætitia here feels that possible calculations may be embarrassing, and tries to avert them. "Do let's get on to the third movement. We shall spend all the afternoon talking."

"Very well, Tishy, fire away! Oh, no; it's me." And the third movement is got under way, till we reach a *pizzicato* passage which Sally begins playing with the bow by mistake.

"That's *pits*!" says the first violin, and we have to begin again at the top of the page, and the Professor in his library wonders why on earth those girls can't play straight on. The Ancient Phœnicians are fidgeted by the jerks in the music.

But it comes to an end in time, and then Sally begins again:

"I *know* that story's all nonsense now, Tishy."

"Why?"

"Because mother told me once that my father never saw me, so come now! Because the new-bornest baby that ever was couldn't be too small for its father to see." Sally pauses reflectively, then adds: "Unless he was blind. And mother would have said if he'd been blind."

"He couldn't have been blind, because——"

"Now, Tishy, you see! You're keeping back lots of things that old wheezy squeaker said. And you *ought* to tell me—you know you ought. Why couldn't he?"

"You're in such a hurry, dear. I was going to tell you."

Major Roper said he never saw him but once, and it was out shooting tigers, and he was the best shot for a civilian he'd ever seen. There was a tiger was just going to lay hold of a man and carry him off, when your father shot him from two hundred yards off——"

"The man or the tiger? I'm on the tiger's side. I always am."

"The tiger, stupid! You wouldn't want your own father to aim at a tiger and hit a man?"

Sally reflects. "I don't think I should. But, I say, Tishy, do you mean to say that Major Roper meant to say that he was out shooting with my father and didn't know what his name was?"

"Oh no. He said his name, of course. It was Palliser... that was right, wasn't it?"

"Oh dear no; it was Graythorpe. Palliser indeed!"

"It was true about the tiger, though, because Major Roper says he's got the skin himself now."

"Only it wasn't my father that shot it. That's quite clear." Sally was feeling greatly relieved, and showed it in the way she added: "Now, doesn't that just show what a parcel of nonsense the whole story is?"

Sally had never told her friend about her mother's name before she took that of Nightingale. Very slight hints had sufficed to make her reticent about Graythorpe. Colonel Lund had once said to her: "Of course, your mother was Mrs. Graythorpe when she came to England; that was before she changed her name to Nightingale, you know." She knew that her mother's money had come to her from a "grandfather Nightingale," whose name had somehow accompanied it, and had been (very properly, as it seemed to her) bestowed on herself as well as her mother. They were part and parcel of each other, obviously. In fact, she had never more than just known of the existence of the name Graythorpe in her family at all, and it had been imputed by her to this unpopular father of hers, and put aside, as it were, on a shelf with him. Even if her mother had not suggested a desire that the name should lapse, she herself would have accepted its extinction on her own account.

But now this name came out of the past as a consolation. Palliser indeed! How could mamma have been Mrs. Graythorpe if her husband's name had been Palliser? Sally was not wise enough in worldly matters to know that divorced ladies commonly



fall back on their maiden names. And she had been kept, or left, so much in the dark that she had taken for granted that her mother's had been Nightingale—that, in fact, she had retaken her maiden name at her father's wish, possibly as a censure on the misbehaviour of a husband who drank or gambled or was otherwise reprobate. Her young mind had been manipulated all one way—had been in contact only with its manipulators. Had she had a sister or brother, they would have canvassed the subject, speculated, run conclusions to earth, and demanded enlightenment. She had none but her mother to go to, unless it were Colonel Lund; and the painful but inevitable task of both was to keep her in the dark about her parentage at all hazards. “If ever,” said the former to the latter, “my darling girl has a child of her own, I may be able to tell her her mother's story.” Till then, it would be impossible.

Sally had had a narrow escape of knowing more about this story when the veteran Sub-Dean qualified himself for an obituary in the “Times,” which she chanced upon and read before her mother had time to detect and suppress it. Luckily, a reasonable economy of type had restricted the names and designations of all the wives he had driver tandem, and no more was said of his third than that she was Rosalind, the widow of Paul Nightingale. So, as soon as Sally's mother had read the text herself, she was able to say to the Major, quite undisturbedly, that the old Sub-Dean had gone at last, leaving thirteen children. The name Graythorpe had not crept in.

But we left Sally with a question unanswered. Didn't that show what nonsense old Major Roper's story was? Lætitia was rather glad to assent, and get the story quashed, or at least prorogued *sine die*.

“It did seem rather nonsense, Sally dear. Major Roper was a stupid old man, and evidently took more than was good for him.” Intoxicants are often of great service in conversation.

In this case they contributed to the reinstatement of Mr. Bradshaw. Dear me, it did seem so funny to Sally! Only the other day this young man had been known to her on no other lines than as an established fool, who came to stare at *her* out of the corners of his dark eyes all through the morning service at St. Satisfax. And now it was St. John's, Ladbroke Grove Road, and, what was more, he was being tolerated as a semi-visitor at the Wilsons'—a visitor with explanations in an under-

tone. This was the burden of Lætitia, as soon as she had contrived to get Sally's troublesome parent shelved.

"Why mamma needs always to be in such a furious fuss to drag in his violin, I do *not* know. As if he needed to be accounted for! Of course, if you ask a Hottentot to evenings, you have to explain him. But the office-staff at Cattley's (which is really one of the largest firms in the country) are none of them Hottentots, but the contrary.... Now I know, dear, you're going to say what's the contrary of a Hottentot? and all the while you know perfectly well what I mean."

"Cut away, Tishy! What next?"

"Well—next, don't you think it very dignified of Mr. Bradshaw to be *able* to be condescended to and explained in corners under people's breaths and not to show it?"

"He's got to lump it, if he doesn't like it." Sally, you see, has given up her admirer readily enough, but, as she herself afterwards said, it's quite another pair of shoes when you're called on to give three cheers for what's really no merit at all! What does the young man expect?

"Now, that's unkind, Sally dear. You wouldn't like *me* to. Anyhow, that's what mamma *does*. Takes ladies of a certain position or with expectations into corners, and says she hates the expression gentleman and lady, but *they* know what she means...."

"I know. And they goozle comfortably at her, like Goody Vereker."

"Doesn't it make one's flesh creep to have a mother like that? I do get to hate the very sight of shot silk and binoculars on a leg when she goes on so. But I suppose we never shall get on together—mamma and I."

"What does the Professor think about him?"

"Oh—papa? Of course, papa's *perfectly hopeless*! It's the only true thing mamma ever says—that he's *perfectly hopeless*. What do you suppose he did that Sunday afternoon when Julius Bradshaw came and had tea and brought the Strad—the first time, I mean?... Why, he actually fancied he had come from the shop with a parcel, and never found out he couldn't have when he had tea in the drawing-room, and only suspected something when he played Rode's 'Air with Variations for Violin and Piano.' Just fancy! He wanted to know why he shouldn't have tea when every one else did, and offered him



cake ! And Sunday afternoon and a Stradivarius ! *Do* say you think my parents trying, Sally dear !”

Sally assented to everything in an absent way ; but that didn't matter as long as she did it. Lætitia only wanted to talk. She seemed, thought Sally, improved by the existing combination of events. She had had to climb down off the high stilts about Bradshaw, and had only worked in one or two slight *Grundulations* (a word of Dr. Vereker's) into her talk this morning. Tishy wasn't a bad fellow at all (Sally's expression), only, if she hadn't been taught to strut, she wouldn't have been any the worse. It was all that overpowering mother of hers !

Before she parted with her friend that afternoon Sally had a sudden access of Turkish directness :

“ Tishy dear, *are* you going to accept Julius Bradshaw if he asks you, or *not* ?”

“ Well, dear, you know we must look at it from the point of view of what he would have been if it hadn't been for that unfortunate nervous system of his. The poor fellow couldn't help it.”

“ But are you, or not ? That's what *I* want an answer to.”

“ Sally dear ! Really—you're just like so much dynamite. What would you do yourself if you were me ? I ask you.”

“ I should do exactly whatever you settle to do if I were you. It stands to reason. But what's it going to be ? That's the point.”

“ He hasn't proposed yet.”

“ That has nothing whatever to do with it. What you've got to do is to make—up—your—mind.” These last four words are very *staccato* indeed. Tishy recovers a dignity she has rather been allowing to lapse.

“ By the time you're my age, Sally dear, you'll see there are ways and ways of looking at things. Everything can't be wrapped up in a nutshell. We're not Ancient Phœnicians nowadays, whatever papa may say. But you're a dear, impulsive little puss.”

The protest was feeble in form and substance, and quite unworthy of Miss Sales Wilson, the daughter of *the* Professor Sales Wilson. No wonder Sally briefly responded, “ Stuff and nonsense !” and presently went home.

Of course, the outer circle of Mrs. Nightingale's society (for in this matter we are all like Regent's Park) had their say about her proposed marriage. But they don't come into our story ;



and besides, they had too few data for their opinions to be of any value. What a difference it would have made if old Major Roper had met Fenwick and recalled the face of the dead shot who, it seemed, had somehow ceded his tiger-skin to him. But no such thing happened, nor did anything else come about either to revive the story of the divorce or to throw a light on the identity of Palliser and Fenwick. Eight weeks after the latter (or the former ?) had for the second time disclosed his passion to the same woman, the couple were married at the Church of St. Satisfax, and, having started for the Continent the same afternoon, found themselves, quite unreasonably happy, wandering about in France with hardly a thought beyond the day at most, so long as a letter came from Sally at the *postes-restantes* when expected. And he had remembered nothing !

## CHAPTER XVI

AND thus it came about that Rosalind Palliser (*née* Graythorpe) stood for the second time at the altar of matrimony with the same bridegroom under another name. The absence of bridesmaids pronounced and accented the fact that the bride was a widow, though, as there were very few of the congregation of St. Satisfax who did not know her as such, the announcement was hardly necessary. Discussion of who her late husband was, or was not, had long since given way to a belief that he was a bad lot, and that the less that was said about him the better. If anyone who was present at the wedding was still constructing theories about his identity—whether he had divorced his wife, was divorced himself, or was dead—certainly none of those theories connected themselves with the present bridegroom. As for Sally, her only feeling, over and above her ordinary curiosity about her father, was a sort of paradoxical indignation that his intrusion into her mother's life should have prevented her daughter figuring as a bridesmaid. It would have been so jolly ! But Sally was perfectly well aware that widows, strong-nerved from experience, stand in no need of official help in getting their "things" on, and acquiesced perforce in her position of a mere unqualified daughter.

The Major—that is to say, Colonel Lund—stayed on after the wedding, under a sort of imputation of guardianship necessary for Sally—an imputation accepted by her in order that the old boy should not feel lonesome, far more than for any advantage to herself. She wasn't sure it did him any good though, after all, for the wedding-party (if it could be called one, it was so small), having decided that its afternoon had been completely broken into, gave itself up to dissipation, and went to see "Charley's Aunt." The old gentleman did not feel equal to this, but said if Sally told him all about it afterwards it would be just as good, and insisted on her going. He said he would be

all right, and she kissed him and left him reading Harry Lorrequer, or pretending to.

The wedding-party seemed to have grown, thought the Major, in contact with the theatrical world when, on its return, it filled the summer night with sound, and made the one-eyed piebald cat who lived at the Retreat foreclose an interview with a peevish friend acrimoniously. Perhaps it was only because the laughter and the jests, the good-nights mixed with echoes of "Charley's Aunt," and reminders of appointments for the morrow, broke in so suddenly on a long seclusion that the Major seemed to hear so many voices beyond his expectation.

The time had not hung heavy on his hands though—at least, no heavier than time always hangs on hands that wore gloves with no fingers near upon eighty years ago. The specific gravity of the hours varies less and less with loneliness and companionship as we draw nearer to the last one of all—the heaviest or lightest, which will it be? The old boy had been canvassing this point with another old boy, a real Major, our friend Roper, at the Hurkaru Club not long before, and, after he had read a few pages of Harry Lorrequer he put his spectacles in to keep the place, and fell back into a maze of recurrence and reflection.

Was he honest, or was it affectation, when he said to that pursy and purple old warrior that if the doctor were to tell him he had but an hour to live he should feel greatly relieved and happy? Was his heart only pretending to laugh at the panic his old friend was stricken with at the mere mention of the word "death"—he who had in his time faced death a hundred times without a qualm? But then, that was military death, and was his *business*. Death the civilian, with paragraphs in the newspapers to say "the worst" was feared, and the fever being kept down, and the system being kept up, and smells of carbolic acid and hourly bulletins—that was the thing he shrank from. Why, the Major could remember old Jack Roper at Delhi, in the Mutiny, going out in the darkness to capture those Sepoy guns—what was that place called—Ludlow Castle?—and now! . . .

"Oh dammy, Colonel! Why, good Lard! who's dyin' or goin' to die? Time enough to talk about dyin' when the cap fits. You take my advice, and try a couple of Cockle's anti-bilious. My word for it, it's liver! . . ." And then old Jack followed this with an earthquake-attack of coughing that looked very much as if the cap was going to fit. But came out of it



incorrigible, and as soon as he could speak endorsed his advice with an admonitory forefinger : “ You do as I tell you, and try ’em.”

But the fossil, who was ten years his senior, answered his own question to himself in the affirmative as he sat there listening to the distant murmur of wheels on the Uxbridge Road and the music of the cats without. Yes, he was quite honest about it. He had no complaint to make of life, for the last twenty years at any rate. His dear little *protégée*—that was how he thought of Sally’s mother—had taken good care of that. But he had some harsh indictments against earlier years—or rather *had* had. For he had dismissed the culprits with a caution, and put the records on a back-shelf.

He could take them down now and look at them without flinching. After all, he was so near the end ! What did it matter ?

There they all were, the neglected chronicles, each in its corner of his mind. Of his schooldays, a record with all the blots and errors worked into the text and made to do duty for ornaments. Not a blemish unforgiven. It is even so with us, with you ; we all forgive our schools. Of his first uniform and his first love, two records with a soil on each ; for a chemical brother spilt sulphuric acid over the first, and the second married a custom-house officer. Of his first great cloud—for, if he did not quite forget his first love, he soon got a second and even a third—a cloud that came out of a letter that reached him in camp at Rawal Pindi, and told him that his father, a solicitor of unblemished character till then, had been indicted for fraudulent practices, and would have to stand his trial for misdemeanour. Of a later letter, even worse, that told of his acquittal on the score of insanity, and of how, when he went back two years after on his first leave, he went to see his father in an asylum ; who did not know him, and called him “ my lord,” and asked him to “ bring his case before the house.” Then of a marriage, like a dream now, with a wife who left him and a child that died ; and then of many colourless years of mere official routine, which might have gone on till he fell down in harness, but for the chance that threw in his way the daughter of an old friend in sore trouble and alone. Not until her loneliness and want of a protector on her voyage home suggested it did the harness come off the old horse. And then, as we have seen, followed the happiest fourth part of his life, as he accounted it, throughout

which he had never felt so willing to die as he had done before. Rosalind Graythorpe grew into it as a kind of adopted daughter, and brought with her the morsel of new humanity that had become Sally—that would be back in an hour from “Charley’s Aunt.”

And now Rosey had found a guardian, and was provided for. It would be no way amiss now for the Major to take advantage of death. There is so much to be said for it when the world has left one aching !

His confidence that his *protégée* had really found a haven was no small compliment to Fenwick. For the latter, with his strange unknown past, had nothing but his personality to rely on ; and the verdict of the Major, after knowing him twelve months, was as decisive on this point as if he had known him twelve years. “He may be a bit hot-tempered and impulsive,” said he to Sally. “But I really couldn’t say, if I were asked, *why* I think so. It’s a mere idea. Otherwise, it’s simply impossible to help liking him.” To which Sally replied, borrowing an expression from Ann the housemaid, that Fenwick was a cup of tea. It was metaphorical and descriptive of invigoration.

But the Major’s feeling that he was now at liberty to try Death after Life, to make for port after stormy seas, had scarcely a trace in it of dethronement or exclusion from privileges once possessed. It was not his smallest tribute to Fenwick that he should admit the idea to his mind at all—that he might have gained a son rather than lost a daughter. At least, he need not reject that view of the case, but it would not do to build on it. *Unberufen !* The Major tapped three times on the little table where the lamp stood and “Harry Lorrequer” lay neglected. He pulled out his watch, and decided that they would not be very long now. He would not go to bed till he had seen the kitten—he usually spoke of her so to her mother. He had to disturb the kitten’s cat, who was asleep on him, to get at the watch ; who, being selfish, made a grievance of it, and went away piqued after stretching. Well, he was sorry of course, but it would have had to come, some time. And he hadn’t moved for ever so long !

“I wonder,” half said, half thought he to himself, “I wonder who or what he really is ? . . . If only we could have known ! . . . Was I right not to urge delay ? . . . Only Rosey was so confident. . . . *Could* a woman of her age feel so sure and be misled ?”



It was *her* certainty that had dragged his judgment along a path it might otherwise have shrunk from. He could not know her reasons, but he felt their force in her presence. Now she was gone, he doubted. Had he been a fool after all?

“Well—well; it can’t be altered now. And she would have done it just the same whatever I said. . . . I suppose she was like that when she was a girl. . . . I wish I had even seen that husband of hers. . . . So odd they should both be Algernon! Does he know, I wonder, that the other was Algernon?” For the Major had religiously adhered to his promise not to say anything to Fenwick about the old story. He knew she had told it, or would tell it in her own time.

Then his thoughts turned to revival of how and where he found her first, and, as it all came back to him, you could have guessed, had you seen his face, that they had lighted on the man who was the evil cause of all, and the woman who had abetted him. The old hand on the table that had little more strength in it than when it wore a hedger’s glove near eighty years ago, closed with the grip of all the force it had, and the lamp-globe rang as the tremor of his arm shook the table.

“Oh, I pray God there is a hell,” came audibly from as kind a heart as ever beat. “*How* I pray God there is a hell!” Then the stress of his anger seemed to have exhausted him, for he lay back in his arm-chair with his eyes closed. In a few moments he drew a long breath, and as he wiped the drops from his brow, said aloud to himself: “I wish the kitten would come.” He seemed happier only from speaking of her. And then sat on and waited—waited as for a rescue—for Sally to come and fill up the house with her voice and her indispensable self.

Something of an inconsistency in the attitude of his mind may have struck across the current of his reflections—something connected with what this indispensable thing actually was and whence—for his thoughts relented as the image of her came back to him. Where would those eyes be, conspirators with the lids above them and the merry fluctuations of the brows; where would those lips be, from which the laughter never quite vanished, even as the ripple of the ocean’s edge tries how small it can get, but never dies outright; where the great coils of black hair that would not go inside any ordinary oilskin swimming-cap; where the incorrigible impertinence and flippancy be we never liked to miss a word of; where, in short, would Sally be if she had never emerged from that black shadow in the past?



Easy enough to say that, had she not done so, something else quite as good might have been. Very likely. How can we limit the possible to the conditional-præter-pluperfect tense? But then, you see, it wouldn't have been Sally! That's the point.

Sally's mother had followed such thoughts to the length of almost forgiving the author of her troubles. But she could not forgive him considered also as the author of her husband's. The Major could not find any forgiveness at all, though the thought of Sally just sufficed to modify the severity of his condemnation. Leniency dawned.

"Yes—yes; I was wrong to say that. But I couldn't help it." So said the old man to himself, but quite as though he spoke to some one else. He paused a little, then said again: "Yes, I was wrong. But oh, what a damned scoundrel! And *what* a woman!" Then, as though he feared a return of his old line of thought, "I wish Sally would come." And a dreadful half-thought came to him, "Suppose there were a fire at the theatre, and I had to wire... why—that would be worst of all!"

So, almost without a pause between, he had prayed for a hell to punish a crime, and for the safety of the treasured thing that was its surviving record—a creature that but for that crime would never have drawn breath.

His reading-lamp had burned out its young enthusiasm, and was making up its mind to go out, only not in any hurry. It would expire with dignity and leave a rich inheritance of stench. Meanwhile, its decadence was marked enough to frank the Major in neglecting "Harry Lorrequer" for the rest of the time, and also served to persuade him that he had really been reading. Abstention from a book under compulsion has something of the character of perusal. Gibbon could not have collected his materials on those lines, certainly. But the Major felt his conscience clearer from believing that he meant to go on where he had been obliged to stop. He cancelled "Harry Lorrequer," put him back in the bookcase to make an incident, then began actively waiting for the return of the playgoers. Reference to his watch at short intervals intensified their duration, added gall to their tediousness. But so convinced was he that they "would be here directly" that it was at least half-an-hour before he reconsidered this insane policy and resumed his chair with a view to keeping awake in it. He was convinced he was

succeeding, had not noticed he was dozing, when he was suddenly wrenched out of the jaws of sleep by the merry voices of the home-comers and the loss of the piebald cat's temper as aforesaid.

"Oh, Major dear, you haven't gone to bed! You will be so tired! Why didn't you go?"

"I've been very happy, chick. I've been reading 'Harry Lorrequer.' I like Charles Lever, because I read him when I was a boy. What's o'clock?" He pulled out his watch with a pretence, easy of detection, that he had not just done so ten minutes before. It was a lie about "Harry Lorrequer," you see, so a little extra didn't matter.

"It's awfully late!" Sally testified. "Very nearly as late as it's possible to be. But now we're in for it, we may as well make it a nocturnal dissipation. Ann!—don't go to bed; at least, not before you've brought some more fresh water. This will take years to hot up. Oh, Major, Major, why *didn't* you make yourself some toddy? I never go out for five minutes but you don't make yourself any toddy!"

"I don't want it, dear child. I've been drinking all day—however, of course, it was a wedding...."

"But you must have some now, anyhow. Stop a minute, there's some one coming up the doorsteps and Ann's fastened up.... No, it's not the policeman. I know who it is. Stop a minute." And then presently the Major hears Sally's half of an interview, apparently through a keyhole. "I shan't open the door... two bolts and a key and a chain—the idea! What is it?... My pocky-anky?... Keep it, it won't bite you... send it to the wash!... No, really, do keep it if you don't mind—keep it till Brahms on Thursday. Remember! Good-night." But it isn't quite good-night, for Sally arrests departure. "Stop! What a couple of idiots we are!... What for?—why—because you might have stuffed it in the letter-box all along." And the incident closes on the line indicated.

"It was only my medical adviser," Sally says, returning with explanations. "Found my wipe in the cab."

"Dr. Vereker?"

"Yes. Dr. Him. Exactly! We bawled at each other through the keyhole like Pyramus and Trilby——" She becomes so absorbed in the details of the toddy that she has to stand a mere emendation over until it is ready. Then she completes: "I mean Thisbe. I wonder where they've got to."

"Pyramus and Thisbe?"

"No, mother and her young man. . . . No, I won't sit on you. I'll sit here; down alongside—so! Then I shan't shake the toddy overboard."

Her white soft hand is so comforting as it lies on the Major's on the chair-arm that he is fain to enjoy it a little, however reproachful the clock-face may be looking. You can pretend your toddy is too hot, almost any length of time, as long as no one else touches the tumbler; also you can drink as slow as you like. No need to hurry. Weddings don't come every day.

"Was it very funny, chick?"

"Oh, wasn't it! But didn't mamma look *lovely*? . . . I've seen it twice before, you know." This last is by way of apology for giving the conversation a wrench. But the Major didn't want to talk over the wedding—seemed to prefer "Charley's Aunt."

"He dresses up like his aunt, doesn't he?"

"Oh yes—it's glorious fun! But *do* say you thought mamma looked lovely."

"Of course she did. She always does. But had the others seen 'Charley's Aunt' before?"

"Tishy and her Bradshaw? Oh yes—at least, I suppose so."

"And Dr. Vereker?"

"Oh, of course *he* had—twice at least. The times we saw it, mother and I. He went too. . . . We-e-e-ell, there's nothing in that!" (We can only hope again our spelling conveys the way the word *well* was prolonged.)

"Nothing at all. Why should there be? What a nice fellow Vereker is!"

"My medical adviser? Oh, *he's* all right. Never mind him; talk about mother."

"They must be very nearly at Rheims by now." This is mere obedience to orders on the Major's part. He feels no real interest in what he is saying.

"How rum it must be!" says Sally, with grave consideration. And the Major's "What?" evolves that "it" means marrying a second husband.

"Going through it all over again when you've done it once before," continues this young philosopher. The Major thinks of asking why it should be rummer the second time than the first, but decides not to, and sips his toddy, and pats the hand



that is under his. In a hazy, fossil-like way he perceives that to a young girl's mind the "rumness" of a second husband is exactly proportionate to the readiness of its acceptance of the first. Unity is just as intrinsic a quality of a first husband as the colour of his eyes or hair. Moreover, he is expected to outlive you. Above all, he is perfectly natural and a matter of course. We discern in all this a sneaking tribute to an idea of a hereafter ; but the Major didn't go so far as that.

"She looked very jolly over it," said he, retreating on generalities. "So did he."

"Gaffer Fenwick ? I should think so indeed ! Well he might !" Then, after a moment's consideration : "He looked like my idea of Sir Richard Grenville. It's only an idea. I forget what he did. Elizabethan johnny."

"What do you call him ? Gaffer Fenwick ? You're a nice, respectful young monkey ! Well, he's not half a bad-looking fellow ; well set up." But none of this, though good in itself, is what Sally sat down to talk about. A sudden change in her manner, a new earnestness, makes the Major stop an incipient yawn he is utilising as an exordium to a hint that we ought to go to bed, and become quite wakeful to say : "I will tell you all I can, my child." For Sally has thrust aside talk of the day's events, making no more of the wedding ceremony than of "Charley's Aunt," with : "*Why* did my father and mother part ? You *will* tell me now, won't you, Major dear ?"

Lying was necessary—inevitable. But he would minimise it. There was always the resource of the legal fiction ; all babes born in matrimony are legally the children of their mother's husband, *quand-même*. He must make that his sheet-anchor.

"You know, Sallykin, your father and mother fell out before you were born. And the first time I saw your mother—why, bless my soul, my dear ! you were quite a growing girl—yes, able to get a staff-officer's thumb in your mouth, and bite it. Indeed, you did ! It was General Pellew ; they say he's going to be made a peer." The Major thinks he sees his way out of the fire by sinking catechism in reminiscences. "I can recollect it all as if it were yesterday. I said to him, 'Who's the poor pretty little mother, General ?' Because he knew your mother, and I didn't. 'Don't you know ?' said he. 'She's Mrs. Graythorpe.' I asked about her husband, but Pellew had known nothing except that there was a row, and they had parted." The Major's only fiction here was that he substituted the name Graythorpe for Palliser.

“Next time I saw her we picked up some acquaintance, and she asked if I was a Lincolnshire Lund, because her father always used to talk of how he went to Lund’s father’s, near Crowland, when he was a boy. ‘Stop a bit,’ said I; ‘what was your father’s name?’ ‘Paul Nightingale,’ says she.” Observe that nothing was untrue in this, because Rosey always spoke and thought of Paul Nightingale as her father.

“That was my grandfather?” Sally was intent on accumulating facts—would save up analysis till after. The Major took advantage of a slight choke over his whisky to mix a brief nod into it; it was a lie—but then, he himself couldn’t have said which was nod and which was choke; so it hardly counted. He continued, availing himself at times of the remains of the choke to help him to slur over difficult passages.

“He was the young brother of a sort of sweetheart of mine—a silly boyish business—a sort of calf-love. She married and died. But he was her great pet, a favourite younger brother. One keeps a recollection of this sort of thing.”—The Major makes a parade of his powers of oblivion, and his failure to carry it out sits well upon him.—“Of course, my romantic memories”—the Major smiles derision of Love’s young dream—“had something to do with my interest in your mother, but I hope I should have done the same if there had been no such thing. Well, the mere fact of your father’s behaviour to your mother. . . .” He stopped short, with misgivings that his policy of talking himself out of his difficulties was not such a very safe one, after all. Here he was, getting into a fresh mess, gratuitously!

“Mamma won’t talk about that,” says Sally, “so I suppose I’m not to ask *you*.” The Major must make a stand upon this, or the enemy will swarm over his entrenchments. Merely looking at his watch and saying it’s time for us to be in bed will only bring a moment’s respite. There is nothing for it but decision.

“Sally dear, your mother does not tell you because she wishes the whole thing buried and forgotten. Her wishes must be my wishes. . . .”

He would like to stop here—to cut it short at that, at once and for good. But the pathetic anxiety of the face from which all memories of “Charley’s Aunt” have utterly vanished is too much for his fortitude; and, at the risk of more semi-fibs, he extenuates the sentence.

“One day your mother may tell you all about it. She is the

proper person to tell it—not me. Neither do I think I know it all to tell.”

“ You know if there was or wasn’t a divorce ?” The Major feels very sorry he didn’t let it alone.

“ I’ll tell you that, you inquisitive chick, if you’ll promise on honour not to ask any more questions.”

“ I promise.”

“ Honour bright ?”

“ Honest Injun !”

“ That’s right. Now I’ll tell you. There was no divorce, but there was a suit for a divorce, instituted by him. He failed to make out a case.” Note that the expression ‘ your father ’ was carefully excluded. “ She was absolutely blameless—to my thinking, at least. Now that’s plenty for a little girl to know. And it’s high time we were both in bed and asleep.”

He kisses the grave, sad young face that is yearning to hear more, but is too honourable to break its compact. “ They’ll be at Rheims by now,” says he, to lighten off the conversation.



## CHAPTER XVII

THOUGH Sally cried herself to sleep after her interview with her beloved but reticent old fossil, nevertheless, when she awoke next morning and found herself mistress of the house and the situation, she became suddenly alive to the advantages of complete independence. She was an optimist constitutionally ; for it *is* optimism to decide that it is "rather a lark" to breakfast by yourself when you have only just dried the tears you have been shedding over the loss of your morning companion. Sally came to this conclusion as she poured out her tea, after despatching his toast and coffee to the Major in his own room. He sometimes came down to breakfast, but such a dissipation as yesterday put it out of the question on this particular morning.

The lark continued an unalloyed, unqualified lark quite to the end of the second cup of tea, when it seemed to undergo a slight clouding over—a something we should rather indicate by saying that it slowed down passing through a station, than that it was modulated into a minor key. Of course, we are handicapped in our metaphors by an imperfect understanding of the exact force of the word "lark" used in this connexion.

The day before does not come back to us during our first cup at breakfast, whether it be tea or coffee. A happy disposition lets what we have slept on sleep, till at least it has glanced at the weather, and knows that it is going to be cooler, some rain. Then memory revives, and all the chill inheritance of overnight. We pick up the thread of our existence, and draw our finger over the last knots, and then go on where we left off. We remember that we have to see about this, and we mustn't be late at that, and that there's an order got to be made cut for the stores. There wasn't in Sally's case, certainly, because it was Sunday ; but there was tribulation awaiting her as soon as she could recollect her overdue analysis of the Major's concealed facts. She had put it off till leisure should come ; and now that she was only

looking at a microcosm of the garden seen through the window, and reflected upside down in the tea-urn, she had surely met with leisure. Her mind went back tentatively on the points of the old man's reminiscences, as she looked at her own thoughtful face in the convex of the urn opposite, nursed in two miniature hands whose elbows were already becoming unreasonably magnified, though really they were next to nothing nearer.

Just to think ! The Major had actually been in love when he was young. More than once he must have been, because Sally knew he was a widower. She touched the shiny urn with her finger, to see how hideously it swelled in the mirror. You know what fun that is ! But she took her finger back, because it was too hot, though off the boil.

There was a bluebottle between the blind and the window-pane, as usual ; if he was the same bluebottle that was there when Fenwick was first brought into this room, he had learned nothing and forgotten nothing, like the old *régime* in France. He only knew how to butt and blunder resonantly at the glass ; but he could do it as well as ever, and he seemed to have made up his mind to persevere. Sally listened to his monotone, and watched her image in the urn.

"I wish I hadn't promised not to ask more," she thought to herself. "Anyhow, Tishy's wrong. Nobody ever was named Palliser—that's flat ! And if there was a divorce-suit ever so, *I* don't care ! . . ." She had to stop thinking for a moment, to make terms with the cat, who otherwise would have got her claws in the beautiful white damask, and ripped.

"Besides, if my precious father behaved so badly to mamma, how could it be *her* fault ? I don't *believe* in mother being the *least* wrong in anything, so it's no use !" This last filled out a response to an imaginary indictment of an officious Crown-Prosecutor. "I know what I should like ! I should like to get at that old Scroope, or whatever his name is, and get it all out of him. I'd give him a piece of my mind, gossipy old humbug !" It then occurred to Sally that she was being unfair. No, she wouldn't castigate old Major Roper for tattling, and at the same time cross-examine him for her own purposes. It would be underhand. But it would be very easy, if she could get at him, to make him talk about it. She rehearsed ways and means that might be employed to that end. For instance, nothing more natural than to recur to the legend of how she bit General Pellew's finger ; that would set him off ! She recited the form of speech to

be employed. "Do you know, Major Roper, I'm told I once bit a staff-officer's finger off," etc. Or would it be better not to approach the matter with circumspection, but go straight to the point. "You must have met my father, Major Roper, etc.," and then follow on with explanations? Oh dear, how difficult it was to settle! If only there were anyone she could trust to talk to about it! Really, Tishy was quite out of the question, even if she could take her mind off her Bradshaw for five minutes, which she couldn't.

"Of course, there's Prosy, if you come to that," was the conclusion reached at the end of a long avenue of consideration, on each side of which referees who might have been accepted, but had been rejected, were supposed to be left to their disappointment. "Only, fancy making a confidant of old Prosy! Why, he'd feel your pulse and look at your tongue, just as likely as not."

But Dr. Vereker, thus dismissed to the rejected referees, seemed not to care for their companionship, and to be able to come back. At any rate, Miss Sally ended up a long cogitation with, "I've a great mind to go and talk to Prosy about it, after all! Perhaps he would be at church."

Now, if this had been conversation instead of soliloquy, Sally's constitutional frankness would have entered some protest against the assumption that she intended to go to church as a matter of course. As she was her only audience, and one that knew all about the speaker already, she slurred a little over the fact that her decision to attend church was influenced by a belief that probably Dr. Vereker would be there. If she chose, she should deceive herself, and consult nobody else. She looked at her watch, as the open-work clock with the punctual ratchet-movement had stopped, and was surprised to find how late she was. "Comes of weddings!" was her comment. However, she had time to wind the clock up and set it going when she came downstairs again ready for church.

St. Satisfax's Revd. Vicar prided himself on the appropriateness of his sermons; so, this time, as he had yesterday united a distinguished and beautiful widow to her second husband, he selected for his text the parable of the widow's son. True, Mrs. Nightingale had no son, and her daughter wasn't dead, and there is not a hint in the text that the widow of Nain married again, or had any intention of doing so. On the other hand, the latter had no daughter, presumably, and her son was alive. And as to marrying again, why, there was the very gist and essence of the



comparison, if you chose to accept the cryptic suggestions of the Revd. Vicar, and make it for yourself. The lesson we had to learn from this parable was obviously that nowadays widows, however good and solvent, were mundane, and married again ; while in the City of Nain, nineteen hundred years ago, they (being in Holy Writ) were, as it were, Sundane, and didn't. The delicacy of the reverend suggestion to this effect, without formal indictment of any offender, passes our powers of description. So subtle was it that Sally felt she had nothing to lay hold of.

Nevertheless, when the last of the group that included herself and the doctor, and walked from St. Satisfax towards its atomic elements' respective homes, had vanished down her turning—it was the large Miss Baker, as a matter of fact—then Sally referred to the sermon and its text, jumping straight to her own indictment of the preacher.

"Why shouldn't my mother marry again if she likes, Dr. Vereker—especially Mr. Fenwick?"

"Don't you think it possible, Miss Sally, that the parson didn't mean anything about your mother—didn't connect her in his mind with——"

"With the real widow in the parable? Oh yes, he did, though! As if mother was a real widow!"

Now, the doctor had heard from his own widowed mother the heads of the gossip about the supposed divorce. He had pooh-poohed this as mere tattle—asked for evidence, and so on. But, having heard it, it was not to be wondered at that he put a false interpretation on Sally's last words. They seemed to acknowledge the divorce story. He felt very unsafe, and could only repeat them half interrogatively, "As if Mrs. Nightingale was a real widow?" But with the effect that Sally immediately saw clean through him, and knew what was passing in his mind.

"Oh no, Dr. Vereker! I wasn't thinking of *that*." She faced round to disclaim it, turning her eyes full on the embarrassed doctor. Then she suddenly remembered it was the very thing she had come out to talk about, and felt ashamed. The slightest possible flush, that framed up her smile and her eyes, made her at this moment a bad companion for a man who was under an obligation not to fall in love with her—for that was how the doctor thought of himself. Sally continued: "But I wish I had been, because it would have done instead."

The young man was really, at the moment, conscious of very

little beyond the girl's fascination, and his reply, "Instead of what?" was a little mechanical.

"I mean instead of explaining what I wanted you to talk about special. But when I spoke, you know, just now about a real widow, I meant a real widow that—that *wids*—you know what I mean. Don't laugh!"

"All right, Miss Sally. I'm serious." The doctor composes a professional face. "I know perfectly what you mean." He waits for the next symptom.

"Now, mother never did wid, and never will wid, I hope. She hasn't got it in her bones." And then Miss Sally stopped short, and a little extra flush got time to assert itself. But a moment after she rushed the position without a single casualty. "I want to know what people say, when I'm not there, about who my father was, and why he and mother parted. And I'm sure you can tell me, and will. It's no use asking Tishy Wilson any more about it." Observe the transparency of this young lady. She wasn't going to conceal that she had talked of it to Tishy Wilson—not she!

Dr. Vereker, usually reserved, but candid withal, becomes, under the infection of Sally's frankness, candid and unreserved.

"People haven't talked any nonsense to *me*; I never let them. But my mother has repeated to me things that have been said to her.... She doesn't like gossip, you know!" And the young man really believes what he says. Because his mother has been his religion—just consider!

"I know she doesn't." Sally analyses the position, and decides on the fib in the twinkling of an eye. She is going to make a son break a promise to his mother, and she knows it. So she gives him this as a set-off. "But people *will* talk to her, of course! Shall I get *her* to tell *me*?"

The doctor considers, then answers:

"I think, Miss Sally—unless you particularly wish the contrary—I would almost rather not. Mother believed the story all nonsense, and was very much concerned that people should repeat such silly tattle. She would be very unhappy if she thought it had come to your ears through her repeating it in confidence to me."

"Perhaps you would really rather not tell it, doctor." Disappointment is on Sally's face.

"No. As you have asked me, I prefer to tell it. Only you won't speak to her at all, will you?"



"I really won't. You may trust me."

"Well, then, it's really very little when all's said and done. Somebody told her—I won't say who it was—you don't mind?" Sally didn't—"told her that your father behaved very badly to your mother, and that he tried to get a divorce from her and failed, and that after that they parted by mutual consent, and he went away to New Zealand when you were quite a small baby."

"Was that quite all?"

"That was all mother told me. I'm afraid I rather cut her short by saying I thought it was most likely all unfounded gossip. Was any of it true? But I've no right to ask questions. . . ."

"Oh, Dr. Vereker—no! That wouldn't be fair. Of course, when you are asked to tell, you are allowed to ask. Every one always is. Besides, I don't mind a bit telling you all I know. Only you'll be surprised at my knowing so very little."

And then Sally, with a clearness that did her credit, repeated all the information she had had—all that her mother had told her—what she had extracted from Colonel Lund with difficulty—and lastly, but as the merest untrustworthy hearsay, the story that had reached her through her friend Lætitia. In fact, she went the length of discrediting it altogether, as "Only Goody Wilson, when all was said and done." The fact that her mother had told her so little never seemed to strike her as strange or to call for comment. It was right that it should be so, because it was in her mother's jurisdiction, and what she did or said was right. Cannot most of us recall things unquestioned in our youth that we have marvelled at our passive acceptance of since? Sally's mother's silence about her father was ingrained in the nature of things, and she had never speculated about him so much as she had done since Professor Wilson's remark across the table had led to Lætitia's tale about Major Roper and the tiger-shooting.

Sally's version of her mother's history was comforting to her hearer on one point: it contained no hint that the fugitive to Australia was not her father. Now, the fact is that the doctor, in repeating what his mother had said to him, had passed over some speculations of hers about Sally's paternity. No wonder the two records confirmed each other, seeing that the point suppressed by the doctor had been studiously kept from Sally by all her informants. He, for his part, felt that the bargain did not include speculations of his mother's.



“Well, doctor?” Thus Sally, at the end of a very short pause for consideration. Vereker does not seem to need a longer one. “You mean, Miss Sally, do I think people talk spitefully of Mrs. Nightingale—I suppose I must say Mrs. Fenwick now—behind her back? Isn’t that the sort of question?” Sally, for response, looks a little short nod at the doctor, instead of words. He goes on: “Well, then, I don’t think they do. And I don’t think you need fret about it. People will talk about the story of the quarrel and separation, of course, but it doesn’t follow that anything will be said against either your father or mother. Things of this sort happen every day, with fault on neither side.”

“You think it was just a row?”

“Most likely. The only thing that seems to me to tell against your father is what you said your mother said just now—something about having forgiven him for your sake.” Sally repeats her nod. “Well, even that might be accounted for by supposing that he had been very hot-tempered and unjust and violent. He was quite a young chap, you see. . . .”

“You mean like—like supposing Jeremiah were to go into a tantrum now and flare up—he does sometimes—and then they were both to miff off?”

“Something of that sort. Very likely they would have understood each other better if they had been a little older and wiser. . . .”

“Like us?” says Sally, with perfect unconsciousness of one aspect of the remark. “And then they might have gone on till now.” Regret that they did not do so is on her face, till she suddenly sees a new contingency. “But then we shouldn’t have had Jeremiah. I shouldn’t have fancied that at all.” She doesn’t really see why the doctor smiled at this, but adds a grave explanation: “I mean, if I’d tried both, I might have preferred my step.” But there they were at Glenmoira Road, and must say good-bye till Brahms on Thursday.

Only, the doctor did (as a matter of history) walk down that road with Sally as far as the gate with Krakatoa Villa on it, and got home late for his mid-day Sunday dinner, and was told by his mother that he might have considered the servants. She herself was, meekly, out of it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THIS was the best of the swimming-bath season, and Sally rarely passed a day without a turn at her favourite exercise. If her swimming-bath had been open on Sunday, she wouldn't have gone to church yesterday, not even to meet Dr. Vereker and talk about her father to him. As it was, she very nearly came away from Krakatoa Villa next morning without waiting to see the letter from Rheims, the post being late. Why is everything late on Monday ?

However, she was intercepted by the postman and the foreign postmark—a dozen words on a card, but she read them several times, and put the card in her pocket to show to Lætitia Wilson. She was pretty sure to be there. And so she was, and by ten o'clock had seen the card and exhausted its contents. And by five-minutes-past Sally was impending over the sparkling water of Paddington Swimming-Bath. She was dry so far, and her blue bathing-dress could stick out. But it was not to be for long, for her two hands went together after a preliminary stretch to make a cutwater, and down went Sally with a mighty splash into the deep—into the moderately deep, suppose we say—at any rate into ten thousand gallons of properly filtered Thames water, which had been (no doubt) sterilised and disinfected and examined under powerful microscopes until it hadn't got a microbe to bless itself with. When she came up at the other end, to taunt Lætitia Wilson with her cowardice for not doing likewise, she was a smooth and shiny Sally, like a deep blue seal above water, but with modifications towards floating fins below. ☼

“Now tell me about the row last night,” said she, after reproaches met by Lætitia with, “It's no use, dear. I wasn't born a herring like you.”

Sally must have heard there had been some family dissension at Ladbroke Grove Road as she came into the bath with

Lætitia, whom she met at the towel-yielding *guichet*. However, the latter wasn't disposed to discuss family matters in an open swimming-bath in the hearing of the custodian, to say nothing of possible concealed dressers in horse-boxes alongside.

"My dear child, is this the place to talk about things in? Do be a little discreet sometimes," is her reply to Sally's request.

"There's nobody here but us. Cut away, Tishy!" But Miss Wilson will *not* talk about the row, whatever it was, with the chance of goodness-knows-who coming in any minute. For one thing, she wants to enjoy the telling, and not to be interrupted. So it is deferred to a more fitting season and place.

Goodness-knows-who (presumably) came in in the shape of Henriette Prince, who was, after Sally, the next best swimmer in the Ladies' Club. After a short race or two, won by Sally in spite of heavy odds against her, the two girls turned their attention to the art of rescuing drowning persons. A very amusing game was played, each alternately committing suicide off the edge of the bath while the other took a header to her rescue from the elevation which we just now saw Sally on ready to plunge. The rules were clear. The suicide was to do her best to drag her rescuer under water and to avoid being dragged into the shallow end of the bath.

"I know you'll both get drowned if you play those tricks," says Lætitia nervously.

"No—we *shan't*," vociferates Sally from the brink. "Now, are you ready, Miss Prince? Very well. Tishy, count ten!"

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't! One—two—three . . ." And Lætitia, all whose dignity and force of character go when she is bathing, does as she is bidden, and, at the "ten," the suicide, with a cry of despair, hurls herself madly into the water, and the rescuer flies to her succour. What she has to do is to grasp the struggling quarry by the elbows from behind and keep out of the reach of her hands. But the tussle that ensues in the water is a short one, for the rescuer is no match for the supposed involuntary resistance of the convulsed suicide, who eludes the coming grasp of her hand with eel-like dexterity, and has her round the waist and drags her under water in a couple of seconds.

"There now!" says Sally triumphantly, as they stand spluttering and choking in the shallow water to recover breath. "Didn't I do that beautifully?"



"Well, but *anybody* could like that. When real people are drowning they don't do it like that." Miss Prince is rather rueful about it. But Sally is exultant.

"Oh, don't they!" she says. "They're worse when it's real drowning—heaps worse!" Whereon both the other girls affirm in chorus that then nobody can be saved without the Humane Society's drags—unless, indeed, you wait till they are insensible.

"Can't they?" says Sally, with supreme contempt. "We were both of us drowned that time fair. But now you go and drown yourself, and see if I don't fish you out. Fire away!"

They fire away, and the determined suicide plays her part with spirit. But she is no match for the submarine tactics of her rescuer, who seems just as happy under water as on land, and rising under her at the end of a resolute deep plunge, makes a successful grasp at the head of her prey, who is ignominiously towed into safety, doing her best to drown herself to the last.

This little incident is so amusing and exciting that the three young ladies, who walk home together westward, can talk of nothing but rescues all the way to Notting Hill. Then Miss Henriette Prince goes on alone, and as Lætitia and Sally turn off the main road towards the home of the former, the latter says: "Now tell me about the row."

It wasn't exactly a row, it seemed; but it came to the same thing. Mamma had made up her mind to be detestable about Julius Bradshaw—that was the long and short of it. And Sally knew, said Lætitia, how detestable mamma could be when she tried. If it wasn't for papa, Julius Bradshaw would simply be said not-at-home to, and have to leave a card and go. But she was going to go her own way and not be dictated to, maternal authority or no. Perhaps the speaker felt that Sally was mentally taking exception to universal revolt, for a flavour of excuse or justification crept in.

"Well!—I can't help it. I *am* twenty-four, after all. I shouldn't say so if there was anything against him. But no man can be blamed for a cruel conjunction of circumstances, and mamma may say what she likes, but being in the office really makes all the difference. And look how he's supporting his mother and sister, who were left badly off. *I* call it noble."

"But you know, Tishy, you did say the negro couldn't change his spots, and that I must admit there were such things as social distinctions—and you talked about sweeps and dustmen, you know you did. Come, Tishy, did you, or didn't you?"

“If I said anything it was leopard, not negro. And as for sweeps and dustmen, they were merely parallel cases used as illustrations; and I don’t think I deserve to have them raked up. . . .” Miss Wilson is rather injured over this grievance, and Sally appeases her. “She shan’t have them raked up, she shan’t! But what was this row really about, that’s the point? It was yesterday morning, wasn’t it?”

“How often am I to tell you, Sally dear, that there was really no *row*, properly speaking? If you were to say there had been comments at breakfast yesterday, then recrimination overnight, and a stiffness at breakfast again this morning, you would be doing more than justice to it. You’ll see now if mamma isn’t cold and firm and disinherity and generally detestable about it.”

“But what *was* it? That’s what *I* want to know.”

“My dear—it was—absolutely nothing! Why should it be stranger for Mr. Bradshaw to drive me home to save two hansoms than for you and Dr. Vereker and the Voyseys to go all in one growler?”

“Because the Voyseys live just round the corner, quite close. It came to three shillings because it’s outside the radius.” The irrelevancy of this detail gives Lætitia an excuse for waiving the cab-question, on which her position is untenable. She dilutes it with extraneous matter, and it is lost sight of.

“It doesn’t matter whether it’s cabs or what it is. Mamma’s just the same about everything. Even walking up Holland Park Lane after the concert at Kensington Town Hall. I am sure if ever anything was reasonable, that was.” She pauses for confirmation—is, in fact, wavering about the correctness of her own position, and weakly seeking reassurance. She is made happier by a nod of assent from Miss Sally. “Awfully reasonable!” is the verdict of the latter. Whatever there is lacking seriousness in the judge’s face is too slight to call for notice—a mere twinkle to be ignored. Very little self-deception is necessary, and in this department success is invariable.

“I knew you would say so, dear,” Tishy continues. “And I’m sure you would about the other things too . . . well, I was thinking about tea in Kensington Gardens on Sunday. We have both of us a perfect right to have tea independently, and the only question is about separate tables.”

“Suppose I come—to make it square.”

“Suppose you do, dear.” And the proposal is a relief evidently.

A very slight insight into the little drama that is going on at Ladbroke Grove Road is all that is wanted for the purposes of this story. The foregoing dialogue, ending at the point at which the two young women disappear into the door of No. 287, will be sufficient to give a fairly clear idea of the plot of the performance, and to point to its *dénouement*. The exact details may unfold themselves as the story proceeds. The usual thing is a stand-up fight over the love-affair, both parties to which have made up their minds—becoming more and more obdurate as they encounter opposition from without—followed by reconciliations more or less real. Let us hope for the former in the present case, and that Miss Wilson and Mr. Bradshaw's lot may not be crossed by one of those developments of strange inexplicable fury which so often break out in families over the schemes of two young people to do precisely what their parents did before them; and most ungovernably, sometimes, on the part of members who have absolutely no suggestion to make of any alternative scheme for the happiness of either.



## CHAPTER XIX

“WHY do they call it the *messe des paresseux* ?” The question must have been asked just as Sally looked at her watch because she saw the clock had stopped. But the nave of the Cathedral of Rheims was very unlike that of St. Satisfax as the bride and bridegroom lingered in out of the sunshine, and the former took the unwarrantable liberty, for a heretic, of crossing herself from the Holy Water at the foot of the column near the door. But she made up for it by the amount of *sous* she gave to the old blind woman, who must have been knitting there since the days of Napoleon at least, if she began in her teens.

“You haven’t done it right, dearest. I knew you wouldn’t. Look here.” And Fenwick crosses himself *secundum artem*, dipping his finger first to make it valid.

“But how came you to know ?” His wife does not say this ; she only thinks it. And how came he to know about the *messe des paresseux* ? She repeats her question aloud.

“Because the lazy people don’t come to Mass till ten,” he replies. They are talking under their breath, as English folk do in foreign churches, heedless of the loud gabble and resonant results of too much snuff on the part of ecclesiastics off duty. Their own salvation has been cultivated under a list slipper, cocoanut matting, secretive pew-opener policy ; and if they are new to it all, they are shocked to see the snuff taken over the heads and wooden *sabots* of the devout country-folk, whose ancestors knelt on the same hard stone centuries ago, and prayed for great harvests that never came, and to avert lean years that very often did. The Anglican cannot understand the real aboriginal Papist. Sally’s mother was puzzled when she saw an old, old kneeling figure, toothless and parchment-skinned, on whose rosary a pinch of snuff *ut supra* descended, shake it off the bead in evidence, and get on to the next *Ave*, even as one who has business before her—so many pounds of oakum to pick,

so many bushels of peas to shell. It was all a reality to her; and there was the Blessed Virgin herself, a visible certainty, who would see to the recognition of it at headquarters.

Fenwick passed up the aisle, dreamily happy in the smell of the incense, beside his bride of yesterday's making—she intensely happy too, but in another way, for was not her bridegroom of yesterday her husband of twenty years ago—cruelly wrenched away, but her husband for all that. Still, there was always that little rift within the lute that made the music—pray Heaven not to widen! Always that thought!—that he might recollect. How could he remember the *messe des paresseux*, and keep his mind a blank about how he came to know of it? It was the first discomfort that had crossed her married mind—put it away!

It was easy to put it all away and forget it in the hush and gloom of the great church, filled with the strange intonation from Heaven-knows-where—some side-chapel unseen—of a Psalm it would have puzzled David to be told was his, and a scented vapour Solomon would have known at once; for neither myrrh nor frankincense have changed one whit since his day. It was easy enough so long as both sat listening to *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax*. Carried *nem. con.* by all sorts and conditions of Creeds. But when the little bobs and tokens and skirt-adjustments of the fat priest and his handsome abettor (a young fellow some girl might have been the wife of, with advantage to both) came to a pause, and the congregation were to be taken into confidence, how came Gerry to know beforehand what the fat one was going to say, with that stupendous voice of his?

“*Hoc est corpus meum, et hic est calix sanguinis mei.* We all kneel, I think.” Thus the bridegroom under his breath. And his companion heard, almost with a shudder, the self-same words from the priest, as the kneeling of the congregation subsided.

“Oh, Gerry—darling fellow! How *can* you know that, and not know...”

“How I came by it? It's very funny, but I *can't*, and that's the truth. I don't feel as if I ever *could* know, what's more. But it all seems a matter of course.”

“Perhaps you're a Catholic all the while, without knowing it?”

“Perhaps I am. But I should like to know, because of going to

the other place with you. I shouldn't care about purgatory without you, Roscy dearest. No—not even with a reversionary interest in heaven.”

And then the plot thickened at the altar, and the odour of myrrh and frankincense, and little bells rang to a climax, and the handsome young priest, let us hope, felt he had got value for the loss of that hypothetical girl.

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*                      \*

That little incident in the great church at Rheims was the first anxiety of Rosalind Fenwick's married life—the first resumption of the conditions she had been so often unnerved by during the period of their betrothal. She was destined to be crossed by many such. But she was, as we have said, a strong woman, and had made up her mind to take these anxieties as part of the day's work—a charge upon her happiness that had to be paid. It was a great consolation to her that she could speak to her husband about the tension caused by her misgivings without assigning any special reasons for anxiety that would not be his as much as hers. She had to show uneasiness in order to get the relief his sympathy gave her; but there were unknown possibilities in the Bush enough to warrant it without going outside what was known to both. No need at all that he should know of her separate unseen burden, for that!

But some of the jolts on the road, as we might call them, were to be sore trials to Rosalind. One came in the fourth week of their honeymoon, and quite spoiled for her the last three days of her holiday. However, Fenwick himself laughed about it—that was one comfort.

It was at Sonnenberg. You know the Great Hotel, or Pension, near the Seelisberg, that looks down on Lucerne Lake, straight over to where Tell shot the arrow? If you do not, it does not matter. Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick had never been there before, and have never been there since. And what happened might just as easily have happened anywhere else. But it was there, as a matter of fact; and if you know the place, you will be able to imagine the two of them leaning on the parapet of the terrace that overlooks the lake, watching the steamer from Lucerne creeping slowly to the landing-place at the head of a white comet it has churned the indescribable blue of the lake to, and discussing whether it is nearest to Oriental sapphire or to green jasper at its bluest.



Rosalind had got used to continual wonderment as to when and where Fenwick had come to know so well this thing and that thing he spoke of so familiarly ; so she passed by the strange positiveness of his speech about the shades of jasper, the scarcity of really blue examples, and his verdict that the bluest possible one would be just the colour of that water below them. She was not going to ask him how he came to be so mighty wise about chalcedony and chrysoprase and sardonyx, about which she herself either never knew or had forgotten. She took it all as a matter of course, and asked if the Baron's cigar was a good one.

"Magnificent !" Fenwick replied, puffing at it. "How shall we return his civility ?"

"Give *him* a cigar next time you get a chance."

Fenwick laughs, in derision of his own cigars.

"God bless me, my dearest love ! Why, one of the Baron's is worth my whole box. We must discover something better than that." Both ponder over possible reciprocities in silence, but discover nothing, and seem to give up the quest by mutual consent. Then he says : "I wonder why he cosseted up to us last night in the garden so !" And she repeats : "I wonder why !"

"I don't believe he even knows our name," she continues ; and then he repeats : "I don't believe he knows our name. I'm sure he doesn't."

"And it was so dark, he couldn't have seen much of us. But his cigar's quite beautiful. Blow the smoke in my face, Gerry !" She shuts her eyes to receive it. How handsome Sally would think mamma was looking if she could see her now in the light of the sunset ! Her husband thinks much to that effect, as he turns to blow the smoke on order into the face that is so close to his, as they lean arm-in-arm on the parapet the sun has left his warmth on, and means to take his eyes off in half-an-hour. They really look quite a young couple, and the frivolity of their conduct adds to the effect. Nobody would believe in her grown-up daughter, to see that young Mrs. Algernon Fenwick.

"I am ferry root, Mrs. Harrison. If I introot, you shall say I introot." It is the Baron, manifestly. His form—or rather his bulk, for he cannot be said to have a form ; he is amorphous—is baronial in the highest degree. His stupendous chest seems to be a huge cavern for the secretion of gutturals, which are discharged as heavy artillery at a hint from some unseen percussion-cap within.

Mrs. Fenwick starts, a little taken aback at the Baron's thunderclap ; for he had approached unawares, and her closed eyes helped on the effect. When they opened, they looked round, as for a third person. But the Baron was alone.

"Where is Mrs. Harrison ?" She asks the question with the most absolute unconsciousness that she was herself the person addressed. The Baron, still believing, presumably, that Fenwick is *Mr.* Harrison, is not a person to be trusted with the position created. He develops an offensive waggery, shakes the forefinger that has detected an escapade, and makes of his lips the round *O* of shocked propriety, at heart in sympathy with the transgressor. His little grey eyes glare through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and his huge chest shakes with a substratum of laughter, only just loud enough to put in the text.

"O-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho ! No, do not be afraight. She is not here. We unterzdan. It is all unterzdoot. We shall be ferry tizgreet. . . ." And then the Baron pats space with his fingers only, not moving his hand, as a general indication of secrecy to the universe.

Probably the slight flush that mantles the face he speaks to is less due to any offence at his fat, good-humoured German raillery than to some vague apprehension of the real nature of the position about to develope. But Fenwick imputes it to the former. If Rosey was inclined to treat the thing as a harmless joke, he would follow suit ; but she looks hurt, and her husband, sensitive about every word that is said to her, blazes out :

"What on earth do you mean ? What the devil do you mean ? How dare you speak to my wife like that ?" He makes a half-step towards the burly mass of flesh, still shaking with laughter. But his wife stops him.

"Do be patient, Gerry darling ! Don't flare up like that. I'll have a divorce. I'll tell Sally . . ." a threat which seems to have a softening effect. "Can't you see, dear, that there is some misunderstanding ?" Fenwick looks from her to the Baron, puzzled. The latter drops his jocular rallying.

"I saw last night you did not know me, Mr. Harrison. That is straintch ! Have you forgotten Diedrich Kreutzkammer ?" He says his name with a sort of quiet confidence of immediate recognition. But Fenwick only looks blankly at him.

"He does not know me !" cries the German, with an astonished voice. "'Frisco—the Klondyke—Chicago—the bridge at Brooklyn—why, it is not two years ago . . ." He pauses between the



names of the places, enforcing each as a reminder with an active forefinger.

Fenwick seems suddenly to breathe the fresh air of a solution of the problem. He breaks into a sunny smile, to his wife's great relief.

"Indeed, Baron Kreutzkammer, *my* name is not Harrison. *My* name is Fenwick, and this lady is my wife—Mrs. Fenwick. I have never been in any of the places you mention." For the moment he forgot his own state of oblivion : a thing he was getting more and more in the habit of doing. The Baron looked intently at him, and looked again. He slapped his forehead, not lightly at all, but as if good hard slaps would really correct his misapprehensions and put him right with the world.

"I am all *wronck*," he said, borrowing extra force from an indurated *g*. "But it is ferry bustling—I am bustled!" By this he meant puzzled. Fenwick felt apologetic.

"I don't know how to thank you for the cigar Mr. Harrison ought to have had," said he. He felt really ashamed of having smoked it under false pretences.

"You shall throw it away, and I giff you one for yourself. That is eacey ! But I am bustled."

He continued puzzled. Mrs. Fenwick felt that he was only keeping further comment and enquiry in check because it would have been a doubt thrown on her husband's word to make any. Her uneasiness would have been visible if her power of concealing it had not been fortified by her belief that his happiness as well as hers depended (for the present, at any rate) on his ignorance of his own past. Perhaps she was wrong ; with that we have nothing to do ; we are telling of things as they happened. Only we wish to record our conviction that Rosalind Fenwick was acting for her husband's sake as well as her own—not from a vulgar instinct of self-preservation.

The Baron made conversation, and polished his little powerful spectacle-lenses. He blew his nose like a salute of one gun in the course of his polishing. When *we* blow *our* nose, we hush our pocket-handkerchief back into its home, and ignore it a little. The Baron didn't. He continued polishing on an unalloyed corner through the whole of a very perceptible amount of chat about the tricks memory plays us, and the probable depth of the blue water below. Rosalind's uneasiness continued. It grew worse, when the Baron, suddenly replacing his spectacles and fixing his eyes firmly on her husband, said sternly, "Yes, it



is a bustle !” but was relieved when, equally suddenly, he shouted in a stentorian voice, “ We shall meed lader,” and took his leave.

“ He’s a jolly fellow, the Baron, anyhow !” said Fenwick. “ I wonder whether they heard him at Altdorf ?”

“ Every word, I should think. But how I should like to see the Mr. Harrison he took you for !”

This was really part of a policy of nettle-grasping, which continued. She always felt happier after defying a difficulty than after flinching. After all, if Gerry’s happiness and her own were not motive enough, consider Sally’s. If she should really come to know her mother’s story, Sally might die of it.

Fenwick went on to the ending of the cigar, dreamily wondering, evidently “ bustled ” like the Baron. As he blew the last smoke away, and threw the smoking end down the slope, he repeated her words spoken a minute before, “ I should like to see the Mr. Harrison he took me for.”

“ It would be funny to see oneself as ithers see one. Some power might gie you the giftie, Gerry. If only we could meet that Mr. Harrison !”

“ Do you remember how we saw our profiles in a glass, and you said, ‘ I’m sure those are somebody else ’? Illogical female !”

“ Why was I illogical ? I knew they were going to turn out us in the end. But I was sure I shouldn’t be convinced at once.” And the talk wandered away into a sort of paradoxical metaphysics.

But when, later in the evening, this lady was described by confidential chat at the far end of the salon as that handsome young Mrs. Algernon Fenwick who was only just married, and whose husband was playing chess in the smoking-room, and what a pity it was they were not going to stop over Monday, she thus described, accurately enough, was rather rejoicing that that handsome Mr. Fenwick, who looked like a Holbein portrait, was being kept quiet for half an hour, because she wanted to get a chance for a little chat with that dreadful noisy Prussian Von, who made all the glasses ring at table when he shouted so. Rosalind had her own share of feminine curiosity, don’t you see ? and she was not by any means satisfied about Mr. Harrison. She did not acknowledge the nature of her suspicions to herself, but she would very much like to know, for all that ! She got her opportunity.

“ I shouldn’t the least mind myself if smoking *were* allowed

in the salon, Baron. You saw to-day that I really liked the smoke ?”

“Ja ! when I make that chogue. It was a root chogue. But I am forgiffen ?”

“It was Gerry who had to be forgiven, breaking out like that. I hope he has promised not to do so any more ?”

“He has bromiss to be goot. I have bromiss to be goot. We shall be *sages enfants*, as the French say. But I will tell you, Madame Fenwick, about my vrent Harrison your Cherry is so ligue . . .”

“Let’s go out on the terrace, then you can light a cigar and be comfortable. . . . Yes, I’ll have my wrap . . . no, that’s wrong-side-out . . . that’s right now. . . . Well, perhaps it will be a little cool for sitting down. We can walk about.”

“Now I can tell you about my vrent in America that your hussband is so ligue. He could speague French—ferry well indeed.” Rosalind looked up. “It was when I heard your hussband speaguig French to that grosse Gráfin Pobzodonoff that I think to myself that was Alchernon Harrison that I knew in California.”

“Suppose we sit down. I don’t think it’s too cold. . . . Yes, this place will do nicely. It’s sheltered from the wind.” If she does look a little pale—and she feels she does—it will be quite invisible in this dark corner, for the night is dark under a canopy of blazing stars. “What were you saying about French ?”

“Alchernon Harrison—that was his name—he could speague it well. He spogue id ligue a nadiff. Better than I speague English. I speague English so well because I have a knees at Ganderbury.” This meant a niece at Canterbury. Baron Kreutzkammer speaks English so well that it is almost a shame to lay stress on his pronunciation of consonants. The spelling is difficult too, so we will give the substance of what he told Rosalind without his articulation. By this time she, for her part, was feeling thoroughly uneasy. It seemed to her—but it may be she exaggerated—that nothing stood between her husband and the estabishment of his identity with this Harrison except the difference of name. And how could she know that he had not changed his name ? Had she not changed hers ?

The Baron’s account of Harrison was that he made his acquaintance about three years since at San Francisco, where he had come to choose gold-mining plant to work a property he had purchased at Klondyke. Rosalind found it a little difficult to understand the account of how the acquaintance began, from



want of knowledge of mining machinery. But the gist of it was that the Baron, at that time a partner in a firm that constructed stamping-mills, was explaining the mechanism of one to Harrison, who was standing close to a small vertical pugmill, or mixer of some sort, just at the moment the driving-engine had stopped and the fly-wheel had nearly slowed down. He went carelessly too near the still revolving machinery, and his coat-flap was caught and wound into the helix of the pugmill. "It would have crowned me badly," said the Baron. But he remained unground, for Harrison, who was standing close to the moribund fly-wheel, suddenly flung himself on it, and with incredible strength actually cut short the rotation before the Baron could be entangled in a remorseless residuum of crushing power, which, for all it looked so gentle, would have made short work of a horse's thigh-bone. The Baron's coat was spoiled, though he was intact. But Harrison's right arm had done more than a human arm's fair share of work, and had to rest and be nursed. They had become intimate friends, and the Baron had gone constantly to enquire after the swelled arm. It took time to become quite strong again, he said. It was a fine strong arm, and burned all over with gunpowder, "what you call daddooed in English."

"Did it get quite well?"

"Ferry nearly. There was a little blaze in the choint here"—the Baron touched his thumb—"where the bane remained—a roomadic bane. He burgessed a gopper ring for it. It did him no goot." Luckily Rosalind had discarded the magic ring long since, or it might have come into court awkwardly.

If she still entertained any doubts about the identity of her husband and Harrison, the Baron's next words removed them. They came in answer to an expression of wonder of hers that he should so readily accept her husband's word for his identity in the face of the evidence of his own senses. "I really think," she had said, "that if I were in your place I should think he was telling fibs." This was nettle-grasping.

"Ach, ach! No—no—no!" shouted the Baron, so loud that she was afraid it would reach the chess-players in the smoking-room. "I arrife at it by logic, by reasson. Giff me your attention." He held up one finger firmly, as an act of hypnotism, to procure it. "Either I am ride or I am wronck. I cannot be neither."

"You might be mistaken."

The Baron's finger waved this remark aside impatiently.



"I will fairy the syllogism," he shouted. "Either your husband is Mr. Harrison, or he is *not*. He cannot be neither." This was granted. "Ferry well, then. If he is Mr. Harrison, Mr. Harrison has doled fips. But I know Mr. Harrison would not dell fips. Imbossible!"

"And if he is not?" The Baron points out that in this case his statement is true by hypothesis, to say nothing of the intrinsic probability of truthfulness on the part of anyone so like Mr. Harrison. He is careful to dwell on the fact that this consideration of the matter is purely analysis of a metaphysical crux, indulged in for scientific illumination. He then goes on to apologise for having been so very positive. But no doubt one or two minor circumstances had so affected his imagination that he saw a very strong likeness where only a very slight one existed. "I shall look again. I shall be wicer next time." But what were the minor circumstances, Rosalind asked.

"There was the French—the lankwitch—that was one. But there was another—his *noce*! I will tell you. When my frent Harrison gribe holt of that wheel, his head go down etchvice." The Baron tried to hint at this with his own head, but his neck, which was like a prize-bull's, would not lend itself to the illustration. "That wheel was ferry smooth—with a sharp gorner. *His noce touch that corner.*" The Baron said no more in words, but pantomimic action and a whistle showed plainly how the wheel-rim had glided on the bridge of Mr. Harrison's nose. "It took off the gewdiggle, and made a sgar. Your hussband's noce has that ferry sgar. That affected my imatchination. It is easy to untersdant."

But the subject was frightening Rosalind. She would have liked to hear much more about Mr. Harrison; might even have ended by taking the fat Baron, whom she thoroughly liked, into her confidence. The difficulty, however, was about decision in immediate action, which would be irrevocable. Silence was safer—or, sleep on it at least. For now, she must change the conversation.

"How sweet the singing sounds under the starlight!" But the Baron will not tolerate any such loose inaccuracy.

"It would sount the same in the taydime. The fibrations are the same." But he more than makes up for his harsh prosaism by singing, in unison with the singers unseen:

"Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten  
Dass ich so traurig bin. . . ."

No one could ever have imagined that such heavenly sounds could come from anything so fat and noisy. Mrs. Fenwick shuts her eyes to listen.

When she opens them again, jerked back from a temporary dream-paradise by the Baron remarking, with the voice of Stentor or Boanerges that it is a "ferry broody lied," her husband is standing there. He has been listening to the music. The Baron adds that his friend Mr. Harrison was "ferry vond of that lied."

But when the two of them have said a cordial good-night to the unwieldy nightingale, who goes away to bed, as he has to leave early in the morning, Fenwick is very silent, and once and again brushes his hair about, and shakes his head in his old way. His wife sees what it is. The music has gone as near touching the torpid memory as the wild autumn night and the cloud-race round the moon had done in the little front garden at home a year ago.

"A recurrence, Gerry?" she asks.

"Something of the sort, Rosey love," he says. "Something quite mad this time. There was a steam-engine in it, of all things in the world!" But it has been painful, evidently—a discomfort at least—as these things always are.

Rosalind's apprehension of untimely revelations dictated a feeling of satisfaction that the Baron was going away next day; her regret at losing the choice of further investigation admitted one of dissatisfaction that he had gone. The net result was unsettlement and discomfort, which lasted through the remainder of Sonnenberg, and did not lift altogether until the normallest of normal life came back in a typical London four-wheeler, which dutifully obeyed the injunction to "go slowly," not only through the arch that injunction brooded over, but even to the end of the furlong outside the radius which commanded an extra sixpence and got more. But what did that matter when Sally was found watching at the gate for its advent, and received her stepfather with an undisguised hug as soon as she found it in her heart to relinquish her mother?

## CHAPTER XX

WHEN you come back from a holiday to a sodden and monstrous London, it is best to be welcomed by something young—by a creature that is convinced that it has been enjoying itself, and that convinces you as well, although you can't for the life of you understand the details. Why should anything enjoy itself or anything else in this Cimmerian gloom, while away over there the great Alpine peaks are white against the blue, and elsewhere the music of a hundred seas mixes with their thunder on a thousand shores? Why come home?

But when we do, and find that nothing particular has happened, and that there's a card for us on the mantelpiece, how stuffy are our welcomers, and how well they tone into the surrounding grey when they are elderly and respectable? It is different when we find that, from their point of view, it is we that have been the losers by our absence from all the great and glorious fun the days have been made of while we were away on a mistaken and deluded continent, far from this delectable human ant-hill—this centre and climax of Life with a capital letter. But then, when this is so, they have to be young, as Sally was.

The ex-honeymooners came back to jubilant records of that young lady's experience during the five weeks of separation. She listened with impatience to counter-records of adventures abroad, much preferring to tell of her own at home. Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick acquiesced in the *rôle* of listeners, and left the rostrum to Sally after they had been revived with soup, and declined cutlets, because they really had had plenty to eat on the way. The rostrum happened to be a hassock on the hearthrug, before the little bit of fire that wasn't at all unwelcome, because September had set in quite cold already, and there was certain to be a warm Christmas if it went on like this, and it would be very unhealthy.



"And oh, do you know"—thus Sally, after many other matters had been disposed of—"there has been such an awful row between Tishy and her mother about Julius Bradshaw?" Sally is serious and impressed; doesn't see the comic side, if there is one. Her mother felt that if there was to be a volley of indignation discharged at Mrs. Wilson for her share in the row, she herself, as belonging to the class mother, might feel called on to support her, and was reserved accordingly.

"I suppose Lætitia wants to marry Mr. Bradshaw. Is that it?"

"Of course that's it! He hasn't proposed, because he's promised not to; but he will any time Tishy gives a hint. Meanwhile Goody Wilson has refused to sanction his visits at the house, and Lætitia has said she will go into lodgings."

"Sally darling, I do wish you wouldn't call all the married ladies of your acquaintance *Goody*. You'll do it some day to their faces."

"It's only the middle-aged bouncers."

"Well, dear chick, do try and not call them Goody. What did Goo—there! I was going to do it myself. What did Mrs. Wilson say to that?"

"Said Tishy's allowance wouldn't cover lodgings, and she had nothing else to fall back on. So we go into the Park instead."

Even Mrs. Fenwick's habituation to her daughter's incisive method is no proof against this. She breaks into an affectionate laugh, and kisses its provoker, who protests.

"We-e-ell! There's nothing in *that*. We have tea in the shilling places under the trees in Kensington Gardens. *That's* all right."

"Of course that's all right—with a *chaperon* like you! Who *could* say anything? But do tell me, Sally darling, does Mrs. Wilson dislike this young man on his own account, or is it only the shop?"

"Only the shop, I do believe. And Tishy's twenty-four! What is my stepfather sitting smiling at there in that contented way? Is that a Mossoo cigar? It smells very nice."

"I was smiling at you, Sarah. No, it's not a Mossoo that I know of. A German Baron gave it me.... No, dearest! It really *was* all right.... No—I really can't exactly say how; but it *was* all right for all that...." This was in answer to a comment of his wife.

"Never mind the German Baron," Sally interrupts. "What business have you to smile at me, Jeremiah?" They had christened each other Jeremiah and Sarah for working purposes.

"Because I chose—because you're such a funny little article." He comes a little nearer to her, and putting his arm round her neck, pinches her off-cheek. She gives him a very short kiss—hardly a real one—just an acknowledgment. He remains with her little white hand in his great hairy one, and she leans against him and accepts the position. But that cigar is on her mother's mind.

"How many did he give you, Gerry? Now tell the truth."

"He gave me a lot. I smuggled them. I can't tell you *why* it seemed all right I should accept them. But it *did*."

"I suppose you know best, dear. Men are men, and I'm a female. But he was such a perfect stranger." She, of course, knew quite well that he was not, but there was nettle-grasping in it on her part.

"Yes, he was. But somehow he didn't seem so. Perhaps it was because I flew into such a rage with him about what he called his 'crade chogue.' But it wasn't *only* that. Something about the chap himself—I can't tell what." And Fenwick becomes *distract*, with a sort of restless searching on his face. He sits on, silent, patting Sally's little white hand in his, and letting the prized cigar take care of itself, and remains silent until, after a few more interesting details about the "great row" at Ladbroke Grove Road, all three agree that sleep is overdue, and depart to receive payment.

Rosalind knows the meaning of it all perfectly. Some tiny trace of memory of the fat Kreutzkammer lingered in her husband's crippled mind—something as confused as the revolving engine's connexion with the German volkslied. But enough to prevent his feeling the ten francs' worth of cigars an oppressive benevolence. It was very strange to her that it should so happen, but, having happened, it did not seem unnatural. What was stranger still was that Gerry should be there, loving Sally like a father—just as her own stepfather Paul Nightingale had come to love *her*—caressing her, and never dreaming for a moment how that funny little article came about. Yes, come what might, she would do her best to protect these two from that knowledge, however many lies she had to tell. She was far too good and honourable a woman to care a particle about truthfulness as a means to an easy conscience; she did not mind the least how



much hers suffered if it was necessary to the happiness of others that it should do so. And in her judgment—though we admit she may have been wrong—a revelation of the past would have taken all the warmth and light out of the happy and contented little world of Krakatoa Villa. So long as she had the cloud to herself, and saw the others out in the sunshine, she felt safe, and that all was well.

She would have liked companionship inside the cloud, for all that. It was a cruel disappointment to find, when she came to reflect on it, that she could not carry out a first intention of taking Colonel Lund into her confidence about the Baron, and the undoubted insight he had given into some portion of Fenwick's previous life. Obviously it would have involved telling her husband's whole story. Her belief that he was Harrison involved her knowledge that he was not Fenwick. The Major would have said at once: "Why not tell him all this Baron told you, and see if it wouldn't bring all his life back to him?" And then she would have to tell the Major who he really was, to show him the need of keeping silence about the story. No, no! Danger lay that way. - Too much finessing would be wanted; too many reserves.

So she bore her secret knowledge alone, for their sakes feeling all the while like the scapegoat in the wilderness. But it was a happy wilderness for her, as time proved. Her husband's temper and disposition were well described by Sally, when she told Dr. Vereker in confidence one day that when he boiled he blew the lid off, but that he was a practical lamb, and was wax in her mother's hands. A good fizz did good, whatever people said. And the doctor agreed cordially. For he had a mother whose temper was notoriously sweetness itself, but was manipulated by its owner with a dexterity that secured all the effects of discomfort to its beneficiaries, without compromising her own claims to canonisation.

Fenwick's temper—this expression always means want of temper, or absence of temper—was of the opposite sort. It occasioned no inconvenience to anyone, and every one detected and classed it after knowing him for twenty-four hours. The married couple had not existed for three months in that form before this trivial individuality was defined by Ann and Cook as "only master." Sally became so callous after a slight passing alarm at one or two explosions that she would, for instance, address her stepfather, after hearing his volleys at some offender



in the distance, with, "Who did I hear you calling a confounded idiot, Jeremiah?" To which he would reply, softening into a genial smile: "Lost my temper, I did, Sarah dear. Lost my temper with the Wash. The Wash sticks in pins, and the heads are too small to get hold of;" or, "People shouldn't lick their envelopes up to the hilt, and spoil one's ripping-corner, unless they want a fellow to swear;" or something similar belonging to the familiar trials of daily life.

But really safety-valve tempers are so common that Fenwick's would scarcely have called for notice if it had not been that, on one occasion, a remark of Sally's about a rather more vigorous *émeute* than usual led her mother, accidentally thrown off her guard, to reply: "Yes! But you have no idea how much better he is——" and then to stop suddenly, seeing the mistake she was making. She had no time to see a way out of the difficulty before Sally, puzzled, looked at her with: "Better than when? I've known him longer than you have, mother." For Sally always boasted of her earlier acquaintance.

"No *when* at all, kitten! How much better he is when we are alone! He never flares up then—that's what I meant." But she knew quite well that her sentence, if finished, would have stood, "how much better he is than he used to be!" She was too candid a witness in the court of her own conscience to make any pretence that this wasn't a lie. Of course it was; but if she never had to tell a worse one than that for Sally's sake, she would be fortunate indeed.

She was much more happy in the court of her conscience than she was in that of St. Satisfax—if we may ascribe a judicial status to him, to help us through with our analysis of her frame of mind. His was a court which, if not identical at all points with the analogous exponents of things Divine in her youth, was fraught with the same jurisdiction; was vocal with resonances that proclaimed the same consequences to the unredeemed that the mumblings of a pastor of her early days, remembered with little gratitude, had been inarticulate with. Her babyhood had received the idea that liars would be sent unequivocally to hell, and her maturity could not get rid of it. Outside the precinct of the saint, the brief working morality that considers other folk first was enough for her; within it, the theologism of an offended deity still held a traditional sway. Outside, her whole soul recoiled from the idea of her child knowing a story that would eat into her heart like a cancer; within, a reserve-

corner of that soul, inoculated when it was new and susceptible, shuddered at her unselfish adhesion to the only means by which that child could be kept in ignorance.

However, she was clear about one thing. She would apologise in prayer ; but she would go to hell rather than have Sally made miserable. Thus it came about that Mrs. Fenwick continued a very devout church-goer, and, as her husband never left her side when he had a choice, he, too, became a frequent guest of St. Satisfax, whom he seemed to regard as a harmless though fantastic person who lived in some century or other, only you always forgot which.

His familiarity with the usages of the reformed St. Satisfax, and his power of discriminating the lapses of that saint towards the vices of his early unregenerate days—he being all the while perfectly unconscious how he came to know anything of either—continued to perplex his wife, and was a source of lasting bewilderment to Sally. A particular incident growing out of this was always associated in Rosalind's mind with an epithet he then applied to Sally for the first time, but which afterwards grew to be habitual with him.

“Of course, it's the Communion-table,” he said in connexion with some discussion of church furniture. “We have no altars in our church nowadays. You're a Papist, Sarah !”

“I thought Communion-tables were an Evangelical start,” said Sally irreverently. “A Low Church turn-out. Our Mr. Prince is a Tractarian, and a Ritualist, and a Puseyite, and an Anglican. That's his game ! The Bishop of London won't let him perform High Mass, and *I* think it a shame ! Don't you ? . . . But I say, Jeremiah !” And Jeremiah refrained from expressing whatever indignation he felt with the Bishop of London, to find what Sally said. It was to the effect that it was incredible that he should know absolutely nothing about the original source of his information.

“I can only tell you, Sarah dear,” he said, with the ring of sadness in his voice that always came on this topic, “that I *do* remember nothing of the people who taught me, or the place I learned in. Yet I know about Tract No. 90, and Pusey and Newman ; for all that. How I remember things that were information, and forget things that were things, is more than I can tell you. But can't you think of bits of history you know quite well, without ever recalling where you got them from ?”

“Of course I can. At least, I could if I knew some history.



Only I don't. Oh yes, I do. Perkin Warbeck and Anne of Cleves. I've forgotten about them now, only I know I knew them both. I've answered about them in examinations. They're history all right enough. As to who taught me about them, couldn't say !”

“Very well, Sarah. Now put a good deal of side into your stroke, and you'll arrive at me.”

But the revival of the old question had dug up discomfort his mind had done its best to inter ; and he went silent, and sat with a half-made cigarette in his fingers, thinking gravely. Rosalind, at a writing-table behind him, moved her lips at Sally to convey an injunction. Sally, quickly apprehensive, understood it as “Let him alone ! Don't rake up the electrocution !” But Sally's native directness betrayed her, and before she had time to think, she had said, “All right ; I won't.” The consequence of which was that Fenwick—being, as Sally afterwards phrased it, “too sharp by half”—looked up suddenly from his reverie, and said, as he finished rolling his cigarette, “What won't our daughter ?”

The pleasure that struck through his wife's heart was audible in her voice as she caught it up. “Our daughter won't be a silly inquisitive little puss-cat, darling. It only worries you, and does no good.” And he replied to her, as she came behind him and stood with an appreciative side-face against his, with a semi-apology for the phrase “daughter,” and allowed the rest of what they were speaking of to lapse.

“I called her it for the pleasure of saying it,” said he. “It sounded so nice !” And then he knew that her kiss was approval, but of course had no conception of its thoroughness. For her part, she hardly dared to think of the strangeness of the position ; she could only rejoice at its outcome.

After that it became so natural to him to speak of Sally as “our daughter” that often enough new acquaintances misconceived her relation to him, and had a shrewd insight that Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick must have been married very young. Once some visitors—a lady with one married daughter and two single ones—were so powerfully impressed with Sally's resemblance to her supposed parent that three-fourths of them went unconvinced away, in spite of the efforts of the whole household to remove the error. The odd fourth was supposed to have carried away corrective information. “I got the flat one, with the elbows, in a quiet corner,” said Sally, “and told her Jeremiah



was only step. Because they all shouted at once, so it was impossible to make them hear in a lump."

Mistakes of this sort, occurring frequently, reacted on Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick, who found in them a constant support and justification for the theory that Sally was really the daughter of both, while admitting intellectual rejection of it to be plausible to commonplace minds. They themselves got on a higher level, where *ex-post-facto* parentages were possible. Causes might have miscarried, but results having turned out all right, it would never do to be too critical about antecedents. Anyhow, Sally was *going to be* our daughter, whether she *was* or not.

Rosalind always found a curious consolation in the reflection that, however bewildering the position might be, she had it all to herself. This was entirely apart from her desire to keep Fenwick in ignorance of his past; that was merely a necessity for his own sake and Sally's, while this related to the painfulness of standing face to face with an incredible conjunction of surroundings. She, if alone, could take refuge in wonder-struck silence. If her knowledge were shared with another, how could examination and analysis be avoided? And these would involve the resurrection of what she could keep underground as long as she was by herself; backed by a thought, if needed, of the merry eyebrows and pearly teeth, and sweet, soft youth, of its unconscious result. But to be obliged to review and speculate over what she desired to forget, and was helped to forget by gratitude for its consequences, would have been a needless addition to the burden she had already to bear.

The only person she could get any consolation from talking with was the Major, who already knew, or nearly knew, the particulars of the nightmare of twenty years ago. But, then—we feel that we are repeating this *ad nauseam*—he was quite in the dark about Fenwick's identity, and was to be kept there. Rosalind had decided it so, and she may have been right.

Would she have done better by forcing on her husband the knowledge of his own identity, and risking the shock to her daughter of hearing the story of her outsider father's sin against her mother? Her decision against this course was always emphasised by—may even have been unconsciously due to—her prevision of the difficulty of the communication to Sally. How should she set about it? She pictured various forms of the attempt to herself, and found none she did not shudder at.

The knowledge that such things could be would spoil the whole

world for the girl. She had to confess to herself that the customary paltering with the meaning of words that enables modern novels to be written about the damndest things in the universe would either leave her mind uninformed, or call for a commentary—a rubric in the reddest of red letters. Even a resort to the brutal force of Oriental speech done into Jacobean English would be of little avail. For hypocrisy is at work all through juvenile reception of Holy Writ, and brings out as a result the idea that that writ is holy because it uses coarse language about things that hardly call for it. It Bowdlerises Potiphar's wife, and favours the impression that in Sodom and Gomorrah the inhabitants were dissipated and sat up late. This sort of thing wouldn't work with Sally. If the story were to be told at all, her thunderbolt directness would have it all out, down to the ground. Her mother went through the *pros* and *cons* again and again, and always came to the same conclusion—silence.

But for all that, Rosalind had a background belief that a time would come when a complete revelation would be possible. Her mind stipulated for a wider experience for Sally before then. It would be so infinitely easier to tell her tale to one who had herself arrived at the goal of motherhood, utterly unlike as (so she took for granted) was to be the way of her arrival, sunlit and soft to tread, from the black precipice and thorny wastes that had brought her to her own.

Any possible marriage of Sally's, however, was a vague abstraction of an indistinct future. Perhaps we should say *had been*, and admit that since her own marriage Mrs. Fenwick had begun to be more distinctly aware that her little daughter was now within a negligible period of the age when her own tree of happiness in life had been so curtly broken off short, and no new leafage suffered to sprout upon the broken stem. This identity of age could not but cause comparison of lots. "Suppose it had been Sally!" was the thought that would sometimes spring on her mother's mind; and then the girl would wonder what mamma was thinking of that she should make her arm that was round her tighten as though she feared to lose her, or bring her an irrelevant, unanticipated kiss.

This landmark-period bristled with suggested questions of what was to follow it. Sally would marry—that seemed inevitable; and her mother, now that she was herself married again, did not shrink from the idea as she had done, in spite of her protests against her own selfishness.



Miss Sally's attitude toward the tender passion did not at present give any grounds for supposing that she was secretly its victim, or ever would be. Intense amusement at the perturbation she occasioned to sensitive young gentlemen seemed to be the nearest approach to reciprocating their sentiments that she held out any hopes of. She admitted as a pure abstraction that it was possible to be in love, but regarded applicants as obstacles that stood in their own way.

"I'm sure his adoration does him great credit," she said to Lætitia one day about a new devotee—for there was no lack of them. "But it's his eyes, and his nose, and his mouth, and his chin, and his ears, and his hair, and his hands, and his feet, and his altogether that——"

"That what?" asked her friend.

"That you can't expect a girl to, then, if you insist upon it."

"Some girl will, you'll see, one of these days."

"What!—even that man with teeth!" This was some chance acquaintance, useful for illustration, but not in the story. Lætitia knew enough of him to give a testimonial.

"He's a very good fellow, whatever you may say!" said she.

"My dear Tishy! Goodness is the distinguishing feature of the opposite sex. I speak as a person of my own. Men's moral qualities are always high. If it wasn't for their appearance, and their manners, and their defective intelligences, they would make the most charming husbands."

"How very young you are!" Miss Wilson said, superior experience oozing out at every pore. Sally might have passed this by, but when it came to patting you on the cheek, she drew a line.

"Tishy dear, do you mean to go on like that when I'm a hundred and you are a hundred and five?"

"Yes, dear. At least, I can't say. Anything may have happened by then."

"What sort of thing? Come, Tishy, don't be enigmatical. For instance?"

"You'll change your mind and be wiser—you'll see." Which might have been consecutive in another conversation. But it was insufferably patronising in Lætitia to evade the centenarian forecast that should have come in naturally, and retreat into a vague abstraction, managing to make it appear (Sally couldn't say how or why) that her own general remarks about man, which meant nothing, were a formal proclamation of celibacy on her



part. It is odd how little the mere wording of a conversation may convey, especially girls' conversation. What is there in the above to warrant what came next from Sally ?

"If you mean Dr. Vereker, that's ridiculous."

"I never mentioned his name, dear."

"Of course you didn't; you couldn't have, and wouldn't have. But anybody could tell what you meant, just the same, by leaving your mouth open when you'd done speaking." We confess freely that we should not have known, but what are we ? Why *should* Lætitia's having left her lips slightly ajar, instead of closing them, have "meant Dr. Vereker" ?

But the fact is—to quote an expression of Sally's own—brain-waves were the rule and not the exception with her. And hypnotic suggestion raged as between her and Miss Lætitia Wilson, interrupting practice, and involving the performers in wide-ranging, irrelevant discussion. It was on a musical occasion at Ladbroke Grove Road that this conversation took place.

Lætitia wasn't going to deny Dr. Vereker, evidently, or else there really was something very engrossing about her G string. Sally went on, while she dog's-eared her music, which was new, to get good turning-over advantages when it came to playing.

"My medical adviser's not bad, taken as an aunt. I don't quite know what I should do without poor Prosy. But as for anything, of course that's absurd. Why, half the fun is that there *isn't* anything !"

Lætitia knew as well as possible that her young friend, once started, would develop the subject on her own lines without further help from her. She furnished her face with a faint expression of amused waiting, not strong enough to be indictable, but operative, and said never a word.

"Foolery would spoil it all," pursued Sally ; "in fact, I put my foot down at the first go-off. I pointed out that I stipulated to be considered a chap. Prosy showed tact—I must say that for Prosy—distinctly tact. You see, if I had had to say a single word to him on the subject, it would have been all up." Then possibly, in response to a threat of an inflexion in her friend's waiting countenance, "I should say, when I make use of the expression 'pointed out,' perhaps I ought to say 'conveyed to him.' " Sally gets the viola in place for a start, and asks is her friend ready ? Waiting, it seems ; so she merely adds, "Yes, I should say conveyed it to him." And off they go with the new piece of music in B flat, and are soon involved in terrifying com-

plications which have to be done all over again. At the end, they are ungrateful to B flat, and say they don't care much for it; it will be better when they can play it, however. Then Lætitia schemes to wind Sally up a little.

"Doesn't the Goody goozle at you about him, though? You said she did."

"The Goody—oh yes! (By-the-by, mother says I mustn't call your ma Goody Wilson, or I shall do it to her face, and there'll be a pretty how-do-you-do.) Prosy's parent broods over one, and gloats as if one was crumpets; but Prosy himself is very good about her—aware of her shortcomings."

"I don't care what you call *my* mother. Call her any name you like. But what does Dr. Vereker say?"

"About his'n? Says she's a dear good mother, and I mustn't mind her. I say, Tishy!"

"What, dear?"

"What *is* the present position of the row? You said your mother. You know you did—coming from the bath—after Henriette went away."

"I did say my mother, dear. But I wish it were otherwise. I've told Mr. Bradshaw so."

"You'd be much nicer if you said Julius. Told him what?"

"Told him a girl can't run counter to the wishes of her family in practice. Of course, M—well, then, Julius, if you will have it—is ready to wait. But it's really ridiculous to talk in this way, when, after all, nothing's been said."

"*Has* nothing?"

"Not *to* anybody. Only him and me."

"At Riverfordhook?"

"Why, yes, what I told you. We needn't go over it again."

"In the avenue. And moonrise and things. What o'clock was it, please, ma'am?"

"About ten-fifteen, dear. We were in by eleven." This was a faint attempt to help dignity by a parade of accuracy in figures, and an affectation of effrontery. "But really we needn't go over it again. You know what a nice letter he wrote Aunt Frances?" And instead of waiting for an answer, Tishy, perhaps to avoid catechism about the moonrise and things, ploughs straight on into a recitation of her lover's letter to her aunt: "Dear Lady Sales—Of course it will (quite literally) give me the *greatest possible* pleasure to come. I will bring the Strad;" and then afterwards he said: "I hope your niece will give a full account

of me, and not draw any veils over my social position. However, this being written at my desk here on the shop-paper will prevent any misunderstanding."

"Your Aunt Frances has been hatching you—you two!" says Sally, ignoring the letter.

"She is a dear good woman, if ever there was one. I wish mamma was my aunt-by-marriage, and she her!" And then Lætitia went on to tell many things about the present position of the "row" between herself and her mother, concerning which it can only be said that nothing transpired that justified its existence. Seeing that no recognition was asked for of any formal engagement either by the "young haberdasher" himself—for that was the epithet applied to him (behind his back, of course) by the older lady—or by the object of his ambitious aspirations, it might have been more politic, as well as more graceful, on her part to leave the affair to die down, as love-affairs unopposed are so very apt to do. Instead of which she needs must begin endeavouring to frustrate what at the time of her first interference was the merest flirtation between a Romeo who was tied to a desk all day, and a Juliet who was constantly coming into contact with other potential Romeos—plenty of them. Our own private opinion is that if the Montagus and Capulets had tried to bury the hatchet at a public betrothal of the two young people, the latter would have quarrelled on the spot. Setting their family circles by the ears again would almost have been as much fun as a secret wedding by a friar. You doubt it? Well, we may be wrong. But we are quite certain that the events which followed shortly after the chat between the two girls recorded above either would never have come to pass, or would have taken an entirely different form, if it had not been for the uncompromising character of Mrs. Sales Wilson's attitude towards her daughter's Romeo.

We will give this collateral incident in our history a chapter to itself, for your convenience more than our own. You can skip it, you see, if you want to get back to Krakatoa Villa.



## CHAPTER XXI

YOU can remember, if you are male and middle-aged, or worse, some little incident in your own early life more or less like that effervescence of unreal passion which made us first acquainted with Mr. Julius Bradshaw and his violin. Do you shake your head, and deny it? Are you prepared to look us in the face, and swear you never, when a young man, had a sleepless night because of some girl whom you had scarcely spoken to, and who would not have known who you were if you had been able to master your trepidation and claim acquaintance; and who, in the sequel, changed her identity, and became what the greatest word-coiner of our time called a "speech-friend" of yours, without a scrap of romance or tenderness in the friendship?

Sally's sudden change of identity from the bewitching little gardener who had fascinated this susceptible youth, to a merely uncommonly nice girl, was no doubt assisted by his introduction just at that moment to the present Mrs. Julius Bradshaw. For it would be the merest affectation to conceal the ultimate outcome of their acquaintance.

When Julius came to Krakatoa Villa, he came already half-disillusioned about Sally. What sort of an *accolade* he expected on arriving to keep his passion on its legs, Heaven only knows! He certainly had been chilled by her easy-going invitation to her mother's. A definite declaration of callous indifference would not have been half so effective. Sally had the most extraordinary power of pointing out that she stipulated to be considered as a chap; or conveying it, which came to the same thing. On the other hand, Lætitia, who had been freely spoken of by Sally as "making a great ass of herself about social tommy-rot and people's positions," and who was aware of the justice of the accusation, had been completely jerked out of the region of Grundy by Julius's splendid rendering of Tartini, and had felt disconcerted and ashamed; for Tishy was a thorough musician

at heart. The consequence was an *amende honorable* to the young man, on whom—he having no idea whatever of its provoking cause—it produced the effect that might have been anticipated. Any young lady who wishes to enslave a young man will really do better work by showing an interest in himself than by any amount of fascination and allurements, on the lines of Greuze. We are by no means sure that it is safe to reveal this secret, so do not let it go any farther. Young women are formidable enough, as it is, without getting tips from the camp of the enemy.

Anyhow, Sally became a totally different identity to Mr. Julius Bradshaw. He, for his part, underwent a complete transformation in hers—so much so that the vulgar child was on one occasion quite taken aback at a sudden recollection of his *début*, and said to her stepfather: “Only think, Jeremiah! Tishy’s Julius is really that young idiot that came philandering after me Sundays, and I had quite forgotten it!”

The young idiot had settled down to a reasonable personality; if not to a manifestation of his actual self, at any rate as near as he was likely to go to it for some time to come; for none of us ever succeeds in really showing himself to his fellow-creatures outright. That’s impossible.

Sally had never said very much to her friend of this pre-introduction phase of Julius—had, in fact, thought little enough about it. Perhaps her taking care to say nothing at all of it in his later phase was her most definite acknowledgment of its existence at any time. It was only a laughable incident. She saw at once, when she took note of that sofa *séance*, which way the cat was going to jump; and we are bound to say it was a cat that soon made up its mind, and jumped with decision.

Mrs. Sales Wilson’s endeavour to intercept that cat had been prompt and injudicious. She destroyed whatever chance there was of a sudden *volte-face* on its part—and oh, the glorious uncertainty of this class of cat!—first by taking no notice of it aggressively, next by catching hold of its tail, too late. In the art of ignoring bystanders, she was no match for the cat. And detention seemed only to communicate impetus.

Julius Bradshaw’s first receptions at the Ladbroke Grove House had been based mainly on his Stradivarius. The Dragon may be said to have admitted the instrument, but only to have tolerated its owner, as one might tolerate an organman who owned a distinguished monkey. Still, the position was an ambi-

guous one. The Dragon felt she had made a mistake in not shutting the door against this lion at first. She had "let him in, to see if she could turn him out agin," and the crisis of the campaign had come over the question whether Mr. Bradshaw might, or should, or could be received into the inner bosom of the household—that is to say, the dinner-bosom. The Dragon said no—she drew the line at that. Tea, yes—dinner, no!

After many small engagements over the question in the abstract, the plot thickened with reference to the arrangements of a particular Thursday evening. The Dragon felt that a decisive battle must be fought; the more so that her son Egerton, whom she had relied on to back her against a haberdasher, though he might have been useless against a jockey or a professional cricketer, had gone over to the enemy, and announced (for the Professor had failed to communicate the virus of scholarship to this young man) that he was unanimous that Mr. Bradshaw should be forthwith invited to dinner.

His mother resorted to the head of the household as to a Court of Appeal, but not, as we think, in a manner likely to be effective. Her natural desire to avenge herself on that magazine of learning for marrying her produced an unconciliatory tone, even in her preamble.

"I suppose," she said, abruptly entering his library in the vital centre of a delectable refutation of an ignoramus—"I suppose it's no use looking to you for sympathy in a matter of this sort, but——"

"I'm busy," said the Professor; "wouldn't some other time do as well?"

"I knew what I had to expect!" said the lady, at once allowing her desire to embitter her relations with her husband to get the better of her interest in the measure she desired to pass through Parliament. She left the room, closing the door after her with venomous quietness.

The refutation would have to stand over; it was spoiled now, and the delicious sarcasm that was on his pen's tip was lost irrevocably. He blotted a sentence in the middle, put his pen in a wet sponge, and opened his door. He jerked it savagely open to express his attitude of mind towards interruption. His "*What is it?*" as he did so was in keeping with the door-jerk.

"I can speak of nothing to you if you are so *tetchy*"—a word said spitefully, with a jerk explanatory of its meaning.

"Another time will do better, now. I prefer to wait."



When these two played at the domestic game of exasperate-my-neighbour, the temper lost by the one was picked up by the other, and added to his or her pack. It was so often *her* pack that there must have been an unfair allotment of knaves in it when dealt—you know what that means in beggar-my-neighbour? On this occasion Mrs. Wilson won heavily. It was not every day that she had a chance of showing her great forbearance and self-restraint, on the stairs to an audience of a man in leather knee-caps who was laying a new drugget in the passage, and a model of discretion with a dustpan, whose self-subordination was beyond praise; her daughter Athene in the passage below inditing her son Egerton for a misappropriation of three-and-fivepence; and a faint suspicion of Lætitia's bedroom door on the jar, for her to listen through, above.

It wasn't fair on the Professor, though; for even before he exploded, his lady-wife had had ample opportunity of reconnoitring the battle-field, and, as it were, negotiating with auxiliaries, by a show of gentle sweetness which had the force of announcement that she was being misunderstood elsewhere. But she would bear it, conscious of rectitude. Now, the Professor didn't know there was anyone within hearing; so he snapped, and she bit him *sotto voce*, but raised a meek voice to follow:

"Another time will be better. I prefer to wait." This was all the public heard of her speech. But she went into the library.

"What do you want to speak to me about?" Thus the Professor, remaining standing to enjoin the temporary character of the interview; to countercheck which the lady sank in an armchair with her back to the light. Both she and Lætitia conveyed majesty in swoops—filled up *fauteuils*—could motion humbler people to take a seat beside them. "Tishy's Goody runs into skirts—so does *she* if you come to that!" was Sally's marginal note on this point. The countercheck was effectual, and from her position of vantage the lady fired her first shot.

"You know perfectly well what I want to speak about." The awkward part of this was that the Professor did know.

"Suppose I do; go on!" This only improved his position very slightly, but it compelled the bill to be read a first time.

"Do you wish your daughter to marry a haberdasher?"

"I do not. If I did, I should take her round to some of the shops."

But his wife is in no humour to be jested with. "If you cannot be serious, Mr. Wilson, about a serious matter, which concerns

the lifelong well-being of your eldest daughter, I am only wasting my time in talking to you." She threatens an adjournment with a slight move. Her husband selects another attitude, and comes to business.

"You may just as well say what you have come to say, Roberta. It's about Lætitia and this young musician fellow, I suppose. Why can't you leave them alone?" Now, you see, here was a little triumph for Roberta—she had actually succeeded in getting the subject into the realm of discussion without committing herself to any definite statement, or, in fact, really saying what it was. She could prosecute it now indirectly, on the lines of congenial contradiction of her husband.

"I fully expected to be accused of interfering with what does not concern me. I am not surprised. My daughter's welfare is, it appears, to be of as little interest to me as it is to her father. Very well."

"What do you wish me to do? Will you oblige me by telling me what it is you understand we are talking about?" A gathering storm of determination must be met, the Dragon decides, by a corresponding access of asperity on her part. She rises to the occasion.

"I will tell you about what I do *not* understand. But I do not expect to be listened to. I do *not* understand how any father can remain in his library, engaged in work which cannot possibly be remunerative, while his eldest daughter contracts a disgraceful marriage with a social inferior." The irrelevance about remuneration was ill-judged.

"I can postpone the Dictionary—if that will satisfy you—and go on with some articles for the Encyclopædia, which pay very well, until after the ceremony. Is the date fixed?"

"It is easy for you to affect stupidity, and to answer me with would-be witty evasions. But if you think to deter me from my duty—a mother's duty—by such pitiful expedients, you are making a great mistake. You make my task harder to me, Septimus, but you do not discourage me. You know as well as I do—although you choose to affect the contrary—that what I am saying does not relate to any existing circumstances, but only to what may come about if you persist in neglecting your duty to your family. I came into this room to ask you to exercise your authority with your daughter Lætitia, or if not your authority—for she is over twenty-one—your influence. But I see that I shall get no help. It is, however,



what I expected—no more and no less.” And the skirts rustle with an intention of getting up and going away injured.

Mrs. Wilson had a case against her husband, if not a strong one. His ideas of the duties of a male parent were that he might incur paternity of an indefinite number of sons and daughters, and discharge all his obligations to them by providing their food and education. Having paid quittance, he was at liberty to be absorbed in his books. Had his payments been large enough to make his wife’s administration of the household easy, he might have been justified, especially as she, for her part, was not disposed to allow him any voice in any matter. Nevertheless, she castigated him frightfully at intervals for not exercising an authority she was not prepared to permit. He was nothing but a ninepin, set up to be knocked down, an Aunt Sally who was never allowed to keep her pipe in her mouth for ten consecutive seconds. The natural consequence of which was that his children despised him, but to a certain extent loved him; while, on the other hand, they somewhat disliked their mother, but (to a certain extent) respected her. It is very hard on the historian and the dramatist that every one is not quite good or quite bad. It would make their work so much easier. But it would not be nearly so interesting, especially in the case of the last-named.

The Professor may have had some feeling on these lines when he stopped the skirts from rustling out of the apartment by a change in his manner.

“Tell me seriously what you wish me to do, Roberta.”

“I wish you to give attention, if not to the affairs—*that* I cannot expect—of your household, at least to this—you may call it foolish and pooh-pooh it—business of Lætitia and this young man—I really cannot say young gentleman, for it is mere equivocation not to call him a haberdasher.”

The Professor resisted the temptation to criticize some points of literary structure, and accepted the obvious meaning of this.

“Tell me what he really is.”

“I have told you repeatedly. He is nothing—unless we palter with the meaning of words—but a clerk in the office at the stores where we pay a deposit and order goods on a form. They were originally haberdashers, so I don’t see how you can escape from what I have said. But I have no doubt you will try to do so.”



"How comes he to be such a magnificent violinist? Are they all . . . ?"

"I know what you are going to say, and it's foolish. No, they are not all magnificent violinists. But you know the story quite well."

"Perhaps I do. But now listen. I want to make out one thing. This young man talked quite freely to me and Egerton about his place, his position, salary—everything. And yet you say he isn't a gentleman."

"Of course he isn't a gentleman. I don't the least understand what you mean. It's some prevarication or paradox." Mrs. Wilson taps the chair-arm impatiently.

"I mean this—if he isn't a gentleman, how comes it that he isn't ashamed of being a haberdasher? Because he *isn't*. Seemed to take it all as a matter of course."

"I cannot follow your meaning at all. And I will not trouble you to explain it. The question now is—will you, or will you not, *do* something?"

"Has the young gentleman?"—Mrs. Wilson snorted audibly—"Well, has this young haberdasher made any sort of definite declaration to Lætitia?"

"I understand not. But it's impossible not to see."

"Would it not be a little premature for me to say anything to him?"

"Have I asked you to do so?"

"I am a little uncertain what it is you have asked me to do."

Mrs. Wilson contrived, by pantomime before she spoke, to express her perfect patience under extremest trial, inflicted on her by an impudent suggestion that she hadn't made her position clear. She would, however, state her case once more with incisive distinctness. To that end she separated her syllables, and accented selections from them, even as a resolute hammer accents the head of a nail.

"Have I not told you *distinctly*"—the middle syllable of this word was a sample nailhead—"a *thousand* times that what I wish you to do—however much you may shirk doing it—is to *speak* to Lætitia—to remonstrate with her about the encouragement she is giving to this young man, and to *point out* to her that a girl in her position—in short, the duties of a girl in her position." Mrs. Wilson's come-down at this point was an example of a solemn warning to the elocutionist who breaks

out of bounds. She was obliged to fall back arbitrarily on her key-note in the middle of the performance. "Have I said this to you, Mr. Wilson, or have I not?"

"Speaking from memory I should say *not*. Yes—certainly *not*. But I can raise no reasonable objection to speaking to Lætitia, provided I am at liberty to say what I like. I understand that to be part of the bargain."

"If you mean," says the lady, whose temper had not been improved by the first part of the speech; "if you mean that you consider yourself at liberty to encourage a rebellious daughter against her mother, I know too well from old experience that that is the case. But I trust that for once your right feeling will show you that it is your *plain duty* to tell her that the course she is pursuing can only lead to the loss of her position in society, and probably to poverty and unhappiness."

"I can tell her you think so, of course," says the Professor, dryly.

"I will say no more"—very freezingly. "You know as well as I do what it is your *duty* to say to your daughter. What you will *decide* to say, I do *not* know." And premonitory rustles end in a move to the door.

"You can tell her to come in now—if you like." The Professor won't show too vivid an interest. It isn't as if the matter related to a Scythian war-chariot, or a gold ornament from a prehistoric tomb, or *variæ lectiones*.

"At least, Septimus," says the apex of the departing skirts, "you will remember what is due to yourself and your family—I am nobody—so far as not to encourage the girl in resisting her mother's authority." And, receiving no reply, departs, and is heard on the landing rejecting insufficient reasons why the drugget will not lay flat. And presently, issuing a mandate to an upper landing:

"Your father wishes to speak to you in his library. *I* wish you to go." The last words not to seem to abdicate as Queen Consort.

Lætitia isn't a girl whom we find new charms in after making her mother's acquaintance. You know how some young people would be passable enough if it were not for a lurid light thrown upon their identity by other members of their family. You know the sister you thought was a beauty and dear, until you met her sister, who was gristly and a jade. But it's a great shame in Tishy's case, because we do honestly believe her seeming

*da capo* of her mother is more skirts than anything else. We credit their respective *apices* with different dispositions, although (yes, it's quite true what you say) we don't see exactly from what corner of the Professor's his daughter got her better one. He's all very well, but . . .

Anyhow, we are sorry for Tishy now, as she comes uneasily into the library to be "spoken to." She comes in buttoning a glove and saying, "Yes, papa." She was evidently just going out—probably arrested by the voices in the library

"Well, my dear, your mother wishes me to speak to you. . . . H'm! h'm! By-the-bye," he interrupts himself, "it really is a very extraordinary thing, but it's just like work-people. A man spends all his life laying carpets, and the minute he lays mine it's too big or too small."

"The man outside? He's very tiresome. He says the passage is an unusual size."

"I should have taken that point when I measured it. It seems to me late in the day now the carpet's made up. However, that's neither here nor there. Your mother wishes me to—a—to speak to you, my dear."

"What does she want you to say, papa?"

"H'm—well!—it's sometimes not easy to understand your mother. I cannot say that I have gathered precisely what it is she wishes me to say. Nor am I certain that I should be prepared to say it if I knew what it was."—Tishy brightened perceptibly.—"But I am this far in sympathy with what I suppose to be her meaning"—Tishy's face fell—"that I should be very sorry to hear that you had made any binding promises to any young gentleman without knowing more of his antecedents and connexions than I suppose you do at the present about this—a—musical friend of yours—without consulting me." The perfunctory tone in which he added, "and your mother," made the words hardly worth recording.

But perhaps the way they, in a sense, put the good lady out of court, helped to make her daughter brighten up again. "Dear papa," she said, "I should never dream for one moment of doing such a thing. Nor would Mr. Bradshaw dream of asking me to do so."

"That's quite right, my dear—quite enough. Don't say anything more. I am not going to catechize you." And Tishy was not sorry to hear this, because her disclaimer of a binding promise was only true in the letter. In fact, our direct



Sally had only the day before pounced upon her friend with, "You know perfectly well he's kissed you heaps of times!" And Tishy had only been able to begin an apology she was not to be allowed to finish with, "And suppose he has . . . ?"

However, her sense of an untruthfulness that was more than merely technical was based not so much on the bare fact of a kissing-relation having come about, as upon a particular example. She knew it was the merest hypocrisy to make believe that the climax of that interview at Riverfordhook, where there were the moonrise and things, did not constitute a pledge on the part of both. However, Tishy is not the first young lady, let me tell you—if you don't know already—who has been guilty of equivocation on those lines. It is even possible that her father was conniving at it, was intentionally accepting what he knew to be untrue, to avoid the trouble of further investigation, and to be able to give his mind to the demolition of that ignoramus. A certain amount of fuss was his duty; but the sooner he could find an excuse to wash his hands of these human botherations and get back to his inner life the better.

Perhaps it was a sense of chill at the suspicion that her father was not concerned enough about her welfare that made Lætitia try to arrest his retirement into his inner life. Or it may have been that she was sensitive, as young folk are, at her new and strange experience of Real Love, and at the same time grated on—scraped the wrong way—in her harsh collision with her mother, who was showing Cupid no quarter, and was only withheld from overt acts of hostility to Julius Bradshaw by the knowledge that excess on her part would precipitate what she sought to avert.

Whatever the cause was, her momentary sense of relief that her father was not going to catechize her was followed by a feeling that she almost wished he would. It would be so nice to have a natural parent that was really interested in his daughter's affairs. Poor Tishy felt lonely, and as if she was going to cry. She must unpack her heart, even if it bored papa, who she knew wanted to turn her out and write. She broke down over it.

"Oh, papa—papa! Indeed, I want to do everything you wish—whatever you tell me. I *will* be good, as we used to say." A sob grew in her throat over this little nursery recollection. "Only—only—only—it isn't really quite true about no promises. We haven't made them, you know, but they're

*there* all the same.” Tishy stops suddenly to avoid a sob she knows is coming. A pocket-handkerchief is called in to remove tears surreptitiously, under a covering pretence of a less elegant function. The Professor hates scenes worse than poison, and Tishy knows it.

“There, there ! Well, well ! Nothing to cry about. *That’s* right.” This is approval of the disappearance of the pocket-handkerchief—some confusion between cause and effect, perhaps. “Come, my child—come, Lætitia—suppose now you tell me all about it.”

Tishy acknowledges to herself that she desires nothing better. Yes, papa dear, she will, indeed she will, tell him everything. And then makes a very fair revelation of her love-affair—a little dry and stilted in the actual phrasing, perhaps ; but then, what can you expect when one’s father is inclined to be stiff and awkward in such a matter, to approach it formally, and consider it an interview ? It was all mamma’s fault, of course. Why should she be summoned before the bar of the house ? Why couldn’t her father find his way into her confidence in the natural current of events ? However, this was better than nothing.

Besides, we softened gradually as we developed the subject. One of us, who was Mr. Bradshaw at first, became Julius later, with a strong lubricating effect. We began with sincere attachment, but we loved each other dearly before we had done. We didn’t know when “it” began exactly—which was a fib, for we were perfectly well aware that “it” began that evening at Krakatoa Villa, which has been chronicled herein—but for a long time past Julius had been asking to be allowed to memorialise the Professor on the subject.

“But you know, papa dear, I couldn’t say he was to speak to you until I was quite certain of myself. Besides, I did want him to be on better terms with mamma first.”

Professor Wilson flushed angrily, and began with a knitted brow, “I wish your mother would——” but stopped abruptly. Then, calming down : “But you are quite certain *now*, my dear Lætitia ?” . Oh dear, yes ; no doubt of that. And how about Julius ? The confident ring of the girl’s laugh, and her “Why, you should hear him !” showed that she, at least, was well satisfied of her lover’s earnestness.

“Well, my dear child,” said the Professor, who was beginning to feel that it was time to go back to his unfinished ignoramus, tyro, or sciolist ; “I tell you what I shall do. When’s he



coming next ? Thursday, to dinner. Very well. I shall make a little opportunity for a quiet talk with him, and we shall see."

The young lady came out of the library, on the whole, comfortabler than she had entered it, and finished buttoning that glove in the passage. As she stood reflecting that papa would really be very nice if he would shave more carefully—for the remains of his adieu were still rasping her cheek—she was aware of the voice of the carpet ; she heard it complain, through the medium of its layer, or stretcher, who seemed to mean to pass the remainder of his days scratching the head of perplexity on the scene of his recent failure to add to his professional achievements.

"It's what I say to the guv'nor"—thus ran his Jeremiad—"in dealin' with these here irregular settin's out, where nothin's not to say parallel with anything else, nor dimensions lendin' theirselves to accommodation. 'Just you let me orfer it in,' I says, 'afore the final stitchin' to, or even a paper template in extra cases is a savin' in the end. Because it stands to reason there goes more expense with an ill-cut squint or obtoose angle, involvin' work to rectify, than cut ackerate in the first go-off. Not but what ruckles may disappear under the tread, only there's no reliance to be placed. You may depend on it, to make a job there's nothin' like careful plannin', and foresight in the manner of speakin'.' And, as I say to the guv'nor, there's no need for a stout brown-paper template to go to waste, seein' it works in with the under-packin'." And much more which Tishy could still hear murmuring on in the distance as she closed the street door and fled to an overdue appointment with Sally, into whose sympathetic ear she could pour all her new records of the progress of the row.

To tell the whole of the prolonged pitched battle that ensued would take too much ink and paper. The Dragon fought magnificently, so long as she had the powerful backing of her married daughter, Mrs. Sowerby Bagster, and the skirmishing help of Athene. This latter was, however, not to be relied on—might go over to the enemy any moment. Mrs. Bagster, or Clarissa, who was an elder sister of Lætitia's, became lukewarm, too, on a side-issue being raised. It did not appear to connect itself logically with the bone of contention, having reference entirely to vaccination from the calf. But it led to an exaggerated sensitiveness on her part as to the responsibility we incurred



by interference with what might (after all) be the Will of Providence. If this should prove so, it would be our duty not to repine. Clarissa contrived to surround the subject with an unprovoked halo of religious meekness, and to work round to the conclusion that it would be presumptuous not to ask Mr. Bradshaw to dinner. Only this resulted absolutely and entirely from her refusing to have her three children all vaccinated from the calf forthwith, because their grandmother thought it necessary. The latter, finding herself deserted in her hour of need by a powerful ally—for three whole children had given Clarissa a deep insight into social ethics, and a weighty authority—surrendered grudgingly. She tried her best to make her invitation to dinner take the form of leave to come to dinner, and partly succeeded. Her suggestions that she hoped Mr. Bradshaw would understand the rules of the game at the table of Society caused the defection of her remaining confederate, Athene, who turned against her, exclaiming: "He won't eat with his knife, at any rate!" However, it was too late to influence current events. The battle was fought and over.

The obnoxious young man didn't eat with his knife when he came, with docility, a day after he received the invitation. Remember, he appears originally in this story as a chosen of Cattley's, one warranted to defy detection by the best-informed genteelologist. He went through his ordeal very well, on the whole, considering that Egerton (from friendship) was always on the alert to give him tips about civilised conduct, and that Mrs. Wilson called him nearly every known dissyllabic name with A's in it—Brathwaite, Palgrave, Bradlaugh, Playfair, and so on, but not Bradshaw. She did this the more as she never addressed him directly, treating him without disguise as the third-person-singular in a concrete form. This was short-sighted, because it stimulated her husband to a tone of civility which would probably have risen to deference if the good lady had not just stopped short of insult.

Egerton and the only other male guest (who was the negative young pianist known to Sally as Somebody Elsley) having found it convenient to go away at smoking-time to inspect the latter's bicycle, the Professor seized his opportunity for conversation with the third-person-singular. He approached the subject abruptly:

"Well, it's Lætitia, I understand, that we're making up to, eh?" Perhaps it was this sudden conversion to the first person

plural that made the young man blush up to the roots of his hair.

"What can I say?" he asked hesitatingly. "You see, Professor Wilson, if I say yes, it will mean that I have been p-paying my addresses, as the phrase is. . . ."

"And taking receipts?"

"Exactly—and taking receipts, without first asking her father's leave. And if I say no——"

"If you say no, my dear young man, her father will merely ask you to help yourself and pass the port (decanter with the little brass ticket—yes, that one. Thank you!). Well, I see what you mean, and we needn't construct enigmas. We really get to the point. Now tell me all about it." We don't feel at all sure the Professor's way of getting to the point was not a good one. You see, he had had a good deal to do with young men in early academical phases of existence—tutorships and the like—and had no idea of humming and hawing and stuttering over their affairs. Besides, it was best for Bradshaw, as was shown by the greater ease with which he went on speaking, and began telling the Professor all about it.

"I shouldn't be speaking truthfully, sir, if I were to pretend things haven't gone a little beyond—a little beyond—the exact rules. But you've no idea how easily one can deceive oneself."

"Haven't I?" The Professor's mind went back to his own youth. He knew very well how easily he had done it. A swift dream of his past shot through his brain in the little space before Bradshaw resumed.

"Well, it was only a phrase. Of course you know. I mean it has all crept on so imperceptibly. And I have had no real chance of talking about it—to *you*, sir—without asking for a formal interview. And until very lately nothing Læt—Miss Wilson . . ."

"Tut-tut! Lætitia—Lætitia. What's the use of being prigs about it?"

"Nothing Lætitia has said would have warranted me in doing this. I *could* have introduced the subject to Mrs. Wilson once or twice, but . . ."

"All right. I understand. Well, now, what's the exact state of things between you and Lætitia?"

"You will guess what our wishes are. But we know quite well that their fulfilment is at present impossible. It may



remain so. I have no means at present except a small salary. And my mother and sister——”

“Have a claim on you—is that it?” The Professor’s voice seems to forestall a forbidding sound. But he won’t be in too great a hurry. He continues: “You must have some possibility in view, some sort of expectation.”

Bradshaw’s reply hesitated a good deal.

“I am afraid I have—I am afraid—allowed myself to fancy—that, in short, I might be able to—to outgrow this unhappy nervous affection.”

“And then?”

“I know what you mean, Professor Wilson. You mean that a violinist’s position, however successful, would be less than you have a right to expect for your daughter’s husband. Of course that is so, but——”

“But I mean nothing of the sort.” The Professor is abrupt and decisive, as one who repudiates. “I know nothing about positions. However, Mr. Bradshaw, you are quite right this far—that is what Mrs. Wilson would have meant. *She* knows about positions. What *I* meant was that you wouldn’t have enough to live upon at the best, in any comfort, and that I shouldn’t be able to help you. Suppose you had a large family, and the nervous affection came back?” His hearer quakes at this crude, unfeeling forecast of real matrimonial facts. He and Lætitia fully recognise in theory that people who marry incur families; but, like every other young couple, would prefer a veil drawn over their particular case. The young man flinches visibly at the Professor’s needlessly savage hypothesis of disasters. Had he been a rapid and skilful counsel in his own behalf, he would have at once pounced on a weak point, and asked how many couples would ever get married at all, if we were to beg and borrow every trouble the proper people (whoever they are) are ready to give away and lend. He can only look crest-fallen, and feel about in his mind for some way of saying, “If I wanted Lætitia to promise to marry me, that would apply. As matters stand, it is not to the purpose,” without seeming to indite the Professor for prematureness. Of course, the position had been created entirely by the Dragon. Why could she not have let them alone, as her husband had said to her? Why not, indeed?

But Master Julius has to see his way out into the open, and he is merely looking puzzled, and letting a very fair cigar out—



and, you know, they are never the same thing relighted. Perhaps what he does is as good as anything else.

"I see you are right, sir, and I am afraid I am to blame—I must be—because my selfish thoughtlessness, or whatever it ought to be called, has placed us in a position out of which no happiness can result for either?" He looks interrogatively into the Professor's gold spectacles, but sees no relaxation in the slightly knitted brow above them. Their owner merely nods.

"But you needn't take all the blame to yourself," he says. "I've no doubt my daughter is entitled to her share of it"—to which Bradshaw tries to interpose a denial—"only it really doesn't matter whose fault it is."

The disconcerted lover, who felt all raw, public, and uncomfortable, wondered a little what the precise "it" was that could be said to be anyone's fault. After all, he and Lætitia were just two persons going on existing, and how could it be any concern of anyone else's what each thought of or felt for the other? It is true he lacked absolution for the kissing transgressions; they were blots on a clean sheet of mere friendship. But would the Dragon be content that he and Lætitia should continue to see each other if they signed a solemn agreement that there was to be no kissing? You see, he was afraid he was going to be cut off from his lady-love, and he didn't like the looks of the Professor. But he didn't propose the drawing up of any such compact. Perhaps he didn't feel prepared to sign it. However, he was to be relieved from any immediate anxiety. The Professor had never meant to take any responsibility, and now that he had said his say, he only wanted to wash his hands of it.

"Now, understand me, Bradshaw," said he—and there was leniency and hope in the dropped "Mr."—"I do not propose to do more than advise; nor do I know, as my daughter is twenty-four, what I can do except advise. We won't bring authority into court.... Oh yes, no doubt Lætitia believes she will never act against my wishes. Many girls have thought that sort of thing. But——" He stopped dead, with a little side-twist of the head, and a lip-pinch, expressing doubt, then resumed: "So I'll give you my advice, and you can think it over. It is that you young people just keep out of each other's way, and let the thing die out. You've no idea till you try what a magical effect absence has; poetry is all gammon. Take my advice, and try it. Have some more port? No—thank me! Then let's go upstairs."

Upstairs were to be found all the materials for an uncomfortable evening. A sort of wireless telegraphy that passed between Bradshaw and Lætitia left both in low spirits. They did not rise (the spirits) when the Professor said, to the public generally, "Well, I must say good-night, but *you* needn't go," and went away to his study; nor when his Dragon followed him, with a strong flavour of discipline on her. For thereupon it became necessary to ignore conflict in the hinterland of some folding-doors, accompanied by sounds of forbearance and a high moral attitude. There was no remedy but music, and as soon as Bradshaw got at his Stradivarius the mists seemed to disperse. The *adagio* of Somebody's quartet No. 101 seemed to drive a coach-and-six through mortal bramble-labyrinths. But as soon as it ceased, the mists came back all the thicker for being kept waiting. And the outcome of a winding-up interview between the sweethearts was the conclusion that after what had been said by the father of one of them, it was necessary that all should be forgotten, and be as though it had never been. And the gentleman next day, when he showed himself at his desk at Cattley's, provoked the remark that Paganini had got the hump this morning—which shows that his genius as a violinist was recognised at Cattley's.

As for the lady, we rather think she made up her mind in the course of the night that if her family were going to interfere with her love-affairs, she would let them know what it was to have people yearning for other people in the house. For she refused boiled eggs, eggs and bacon, cold salmon-trout, and potted tongue at breakfast next day, and left half a piece of toast and half a cup of tea as a visible record that she had started pining, and meant to do it in earnest.

What Lætitia and Julius suffered during their self-inflicted separation, Heaven only knows! This saying must be interpreted as meaning that nobody else did. They were like evasive Trappist monks, who profess mortification of the flesh, but when it comes to the scratch, don't flog fair. Whatever they lost in the cessation of uncomfortable communion at the eyrie, or lair, of the Dragon was more than made up for by the sub-rosaceous, or semi-clandestine, character of the intercourse that was left them. Stolen kisses are notoriously sweetest, but when, in addition to this, every one is actually the very last the shareholders intend to subscribe for, their fascination is increased tenfold. And every accidental or purely unintentionally arranged meeting

of these two had always the character of an interview between people who never meet—which, like most truths, was only false in exceptional cases; and in this instance these were numerous. Factitious absence of this sort will often make the heart grow fonder, where the real thing would make it look about for another; and another is generally to be found.

It might have been unsafe to indulge in speculation, based on the then *status quo*, as to when the inevitable was going to happen. We know all about it now, but that doesn't count. Stories, true or false, should be told consecutively.



## CHAPTER XXII

THE most deeply-rooted instinct of mankind is the one that prompts it to lay the blame on some one else. Mankind includes womankind, and woman includes (for we believe she is still living) the Dragon of the last chapter. As it did not occur to this good lady that her own attitude of estrangement from Lætitia had anything to answer for in the rash and premature development of the latter's love-affair, she cast about for a scapegoat, and found one in the person of Rosalind Fenwick. Some one had schemed the whole business, clearly, and who else could it be but that woman? Of course, Lætitia herself was simply the victim of a plot—she was young and inexperienced; people's daughters are.

But nothing in the nefarious business had escaped the watchful eye of the Dragon. At the time of the very first appearance of "that Mrs. Nightingale" on the scene she had pointed out her insidious character, and forewarned North and North-west Kensington of what was to be expected from a person of her antecedents. It was true no one knew anything about these latter; but then, that was exactly the point.

"It's useless attempting to find excuses for that woman, Clarissa," she had said. "It's always the same story with people of that sort. Whenever they have no proper introduction, they always turn out schemers and matchmakers. I detected her, and said so at once. It is easy for your father to pretend he has forgotten. He always does. My consolation is that I did my duty. And then, of course, it all turns out as I said. Anybody could have known what sort of person she was with half an eye!"

"And what sort of person is she?" asked Clarissa coldly. She had not forgotten the vaccination from the calf.

"The sort of person you would expect. Unless, Clarissa, you are going to take a leaf out of your father's book, and make

believe you do not understand what is transparently on the surface. What interest can Major Roper have in inventing the story, I should like to know ?”

“How does he come to know so much about it ? Who told him ?”

“Who *told* him ? Why, of course that very old gentleman—what’s his name ?—*you* know——” Mrs. Wilson tries if she can’t recollect with a quick vibration of a couple of fingers to back up her brain. “Colonel Dunn !”

“Major Lund ?”

“Lunn or Dunn. Yes, I remember now ; it’s Lunn, because the girl said when she was a child she thought Sally Lunn had something to do with both. You may depend on it, I’m right. Well, Major Roper’s his most intimate friend. They belong to the same club.”

The ladies then lost sight of their topic, which lapsed into a rather heated discussion of whether the very old gentleman was a Colonel or a Major. As we don’t want to hear them on this point, we may let them lapse too.

It may have been because of some home anxieties—notably about the Major, whose bronchitis had been bad—that Rosalind Fenwick continued happily unconscious of having incurred any blame or taken any responsibility on herself in connexion with the Ladbroke Grove row, as Sally called it. If she *had* known of it, very likely it would not have troubled her, for she was really too contented with her own condition and surroundings to be concerned about externals. Whatever troubles she had were connected with the possibility, which always seemed to grow fainter, of a revival of her husband’s powers of memory. Sometimes whole weeks would pass without an alarm. Sometimes some little stirring of the mind would occur twice in the same day ; still, the tendency seemed to be, on the whole, towards a more and more complete oblivion.

But the fact is that so long as she had the Major invalided at Krakatoa Villa (for he was taken ill there, and remained on her hands many weeks before he could return to his lodgings) she had the haziest impressions of the outside world. Sally talked about “the row” while they were nursing the old boy, but really she heeded her very little. Then, when the invalid was so far reinstated that he was fit to be moved safely, Sally went away too, for a change.

The respite to old Colonel Lund was not to be for long.

But the rest, alone with her husband, was not unwelcome to Rosalind.

"I can never have been one-tenth as happy, Rosey darling," said he to her one day, "as I have been in the last six months. I should recollect all about it if I had."

"You're a satisfactory chap to deal with, Gerry—I must say that for you. You always beam, come what may. Even when you fly out—which you do, you know—it's more like a big dog than a wasp. You were always . . ." Now, Rosalind was going to say "always like that"; it was a mistake she was constantly in danger of. But she stopped in time, and changed her speech to "You're not without your faults, you know! You never can come to an anchor, and be quiet. You sit on the arms of chairs, and your hands are too big and strong. No; you needn't stop. Go on!" We like leaving the words to elucidate the concurrent action. "And you don't smell much of tobacco."

Fenwick, however, had noticed the kink in the thread, and must needs wind it back to get a clear line. "I was always what?" said he. His wife saw a way out.

"Always good when your daughter was here to manage you." It wasn't so satisfactory as it might have been, but answered in dealing with a mind so unsuspecting. Sally's having spent Christmas and stayed on a little at a friend's in the country lent plausibility to a past tense which might else have jarred.

"I don't want the kitten all to myself, you know," said Fenwick. "It wouldn't be fair. After all, she *was* yours before she was mine."

There was not a tremor in the hand that lay in his, the one that was not caressing her cheek; not a sign of flinching in the eyes that turned round on him; not a trace of hesitation in the voice that said, with concession to a laugh in it: "Yes, she *was* mine before she was yours." Such skill had grown in this life of nettle-grasping!—indeed, she hardly felt the sting now. This time she was able to go on placidly, in the unconnected way of talk books know not, and life well knows:

"Do you know what the kitten will be next August?"

"Yes; twenty-one."

"It's rather awful, isn't it?"

"Which way do you mean? It's awful because she isn't *fiancée*, or awful because she might be at any minute?"

"You've picked up her way of going to the point, Gerry. I never said anything about her being *fiancée*."



"No, but you meant it."

"Of course I did! Well, then, because she might be any minute. I'm very glad she *isn't*. Why, you know I *must* be!"

"I am, anyhow!"

"Just think what the house would be without her!"

"The best place in the world still for me." She acknowledges this by a kiss on his hairy hand, which he returns *via* her forehead; then goes on: "All the same, I'll be hanged if I know what we should do without our kitten. But has anything made you afraid?"

"Oh no; nothing at all! Certainly; no, nothing. Have *you* noticed anything?"

"Oh dear, no! For anything I can see, she may continue a—a sort of mer-pussy to the end of time." Both laugh in a way at the name he has made for her; then he adds: "Only..."

"Only what?"

"Nothing I could lay hold of."

"I wonder whether you're thinking of the same thing as I am?" Very singularly, it does not seem necessary to elucidate the point. They merely look at each other, and continue looking as Fenwick says:

"They *are* a funny couple, if that's it!"

"They certainly *are*," she replies. "But I *have* thought so, for all that!" And then both look at the fire as before, this being, of course, in the depth of winter. Rosalind speaks next.

"There's no doubt about *him*, of course! But the chick would have told me at once if..."

"If there had been anything to tell. No doubt she would."

"Of course, it's absurd to suppose he could see so much of her as he does, and not..."

"Perfectly absurd! But then, you know, that young fiddler was very bad, indeed, about the chick until he made her acquaintance."

"So he was." Thoughtfully, as one who weighs.

"The kitten met him with a sort of strong geniality that would have knocked the heart out of a Romeo. If Juliet had known the method, she could have nipped Shakespeare in the bud."

"She *didn't* want to. Sally *did*."

"But then Shakespeare might have gone on and written a dry respectable story—not a love-story; an esteem story—about how Juliet took an interest in Romeo's welfare, and

Romeo posted her letters for her, and presented her with a photograph album, and so on. And how the families left cards."

"But it isn't exactly stony geniality. It's another method altogether with the doctor—a method the child's invented for herself."

Fenwick repeats, "A method she's invented for herself. Exactly. Well, we shall have her back to-morrow. What time does she come?" And then her mother says, interrupting the conversation: "What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I thought I heard the gate go."

"Not at this time of night." But Fenwick is wrong, for in a moment comes an imperious peal at the bell. A pair of boots, manifestly on a telegraph-boy's cold feet, play a devil's tattoo on the sheltered doorstep. They have been inaudible till now, as the snow is on the ground again at Moira Villas. In three minutes the boots are released, and they and their wearer depart, callously uninterested in the contents of the telegram they have brought. If we were a telegraph-boy, we should always be yearning to know and share the joys and sorrows of our employers. This boy doesn't, to judge by the way he sings that he is "Only the Ghost of a Mother-in-law," showing that he goes to the music-halls.

Less than ten minutes after the telegraph-boy has died away in the distance Rosalind and her husband are telling a cab to take them to 174, Ball Street, Mayfair.

It does so grudgingly, because of the state of the roads. It wants three-and-sixpence, and gets it, for the same reason. But it doesn't appear to be drawn by a logical horse who can deal with inferences, because it is anxious to know when its clients are going back, that it may call round for them.

For the telegram was that there was "no cause immediate apprehension; perhaps better come.—Major." As might have been expected from such a telegram about a man of his age, just after seeming recovery from an attack of bronchitis, the hours on earth of its subject were numbered. Fever may abate, temperature may be brought down to the normal, the most nourishing possible nourishment may be given at the shortest possible intervals, but the recoil of exhaustion will have its way when there is little or nothing left to exhaust. Colonel Lund had

possibly two or three years of natural life before him, disease apart, when a fierce return of the old enemy, backed by the severity of a London winter, and even more effectually by its fog, stopped the old heart a few thousand beats too soon, and ended a record its subject had ceased to take an interest in a few paragraphs short of the normal *finis*.

We allow our words to overtake our story in this way because we know that you know—you who read—exactly what follows telegrams like the one that came to Mrs. Fenwick. If you are new and young, and do not know it yet, you will soon. However, we can now go back.

When the economical landlady (a rather superior person) who had opened the street door was preceding Rosalind up the narrow stairs, and turning up gas-jets from their reserve of darkness-point, she surprised her by saying she thought there was the Major coming downstairs. "Yes, madam; the Major—Major Roper," she continued, in reply to an expression of astonishment. Rosalind had forgotten that Colonel Lund was, outside her own family, "the Colonel."

It was Major Roper whom we have seen at the Hurkaru Club, as purple as ever and more asthmatic—in fact, the noise that was the Major coming downstairs was also the noise of the Major choking in the fog. It came slowly down, and tried hard to stop, in order that its source might speak intelligibly to the visitors. What time the superior person stood and grudged the gas. In the end, speech of a sort was squeezed out slowly, as the landlady, stung to action by the needless gas-waste, plucked the words out of the speaker's mouth at intervals, and finished them up for him. The information came piecemeal; but in substance it was that he had the day before found his old friend coughing his liver up in this dam fog, and had taken on himself to fetch the medical man and a nurse; that these latter, though therapeutically useless, as is the manner of doctors and nurses, had common-sense enough to back him (Roper) in his view that Mrs. Fenwick ought to be sent for, although the patient opposed their doing so. So he took upon himself to wire. There wasn't any occasion whatever for alarm, ma'am! Not the slightest. "You hear me, and mark what I say—an old stager, ma'am! Ever such a little common-sense, and half the patients would recover!" A few details of the rapid increase of the fever, of the patient's resistance to the sending of his message, and an indication of a curious feeling on



the old Colonel's part that it wouldn't be correct form to go back to be nursed through a second attack when he had so lately got safe out of the first one. All this landed the speaker in something near suffocation, and made his hearers protest, quite uselessly, against his again exposing himself to the fog. Whereon the landlady, with a finger on the gas-tap, nodded toward the convulsed old officer to supply her speech with a nominative, and spoke. What she said was merely : " Hasn't been to bed." And then waited for Rosalind to go upstairs with such aggressive patience that the latter could only say a word or two of thanks to Major Roper and pass up. He, for his part, went quicker downstairs to avoid the thanks, and the gas-tap vigil came to a sudden end the moment Rosalind turned the handle of the door above. . . . Now, what is the object of all this endless detail of what might have been easily told in three words—well, in thirty, certainly ?

Simply this : to show you why Fenwick, following on after some discussion with the cab below, was practically invisible to the asthmatic one, who passed him on the stairs just as the light above vanished. So he had no chance of recognising the donor of his tiger's skin, which he might easily have done in open day, in spite of the twenty years between, for the old chap was as sharp as a razor about people. He passed Fenwick with a good evening, and Mr. Fenwick, he presumed, and his good lady was on ahead, as indicated by the speaker's thumb across his shoulder. Fenwick made all acknowledgments, and felt his way upstairs in the dark till the nurse with a hand-lamp looked over the banisters for him.

When Sally came back to Krakatoa Villa early next day she found an empty house, and a note signed Jeremiah that explained its emptiness. We had been sent for to the Major, and Sally wasn't to be frightened. He had had a better night than last night, the doctor and nurse said ; and Sally might come on as soon as she had had a good lunch. Only she was on no account to fidget.

So she didn't fidget. She had the good lunch very early, left Ann to put back her things in the drawers, and found her way through the thickening fog to the Tube, only just anxious enough about the Major to feel, until the next station was Marble Arch, that London had changed and got cruder and more cold-hearted since she went away, and that the guard was chilly and

callous about her, and didn't care how jolly a house-party she had left behind her at Riverfordhook. For it was that nice aunt of Tishy's that had asked her down for a few days, and the few days had caught on to their successors as they came, and become a fortnight. But he appeared to show a human heart, at least, by a certain cordiality with which he announced the prospect of Marble Arch, which might have been because it was Sally's station. Now, he had said Lancaster Gate snappishly, and Queen's Road with misgiving, as though he would have fain added D.V. if the printed regulations had permitted it. Also, Sally thought there was good feeling in the reluctance he showed to let her out, based entirely on nervousness lest she should slip (colloquially) between the platform.

You don't save anything by taking the pink 'bus, nor any 'bus for that matter, down Park Lane when the traffic tumbles down every half-minute, in spite of cinders lavished by the authority, and can't really see its way to locomotion when it gets up. So you may just as well walk. Sally did so, and in ten minutes reached the queer little purlieu teeming with the well-connected, and named after the great Mysteries they are connected with, that lies in the angle of Park Lane and Piccadilly. Persons of exaggerated sense of locality or mature hereditary experience can make short cuts through this district, but the wayfarer (broadly speaking) had better not try, lest he be found dead in a mews by the Coroner, and made the subject of a verdict according to the evidence. Sally knew all about it of old, and went as straight through the fog as the ground-plan of the streets permitted to the house where her mother and a nurse were doing what might be done to prolong the tenancy of the top-floor. But both knew the occupant had received notice to quit. Only, it did seem so purposeless, this writ of ejectment and violent expulsion, when he was quite ready to go, and wanted nothing but permission.

## CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. FENWICK was not sorry to break down a little, now that her daughter had come to break down on. She soon pulled together, however. Breaking down was not a favourite relaxation of hers, as we have seen. Her husband had, of course, left her to go to his place of business, not materially the worse for a night spent without closed eyes and in the anxiety of a sick-chamber.

“ Oh, mother darling ! you are quite worn out. How is he ? ”

“ He’s quiet now, kitten ; but we thought the cough would have killed him in the night. He’s only so quiet now because of the opiates. Only at his age——” Mrs. Fenwick stopped and looked at the nurse, whose shake of the head was an assent to the impossibility of keeping a patient of eighty alive on opiates. Then, having gone thus far in indicating the grim probabilities of the case, Sally’s mother added, as alleviation to a first collision with Death : “ But Dr. Mildmay says the inflammation and fever may subside, and then, if he can take nourishment——” but got no further, for incredulity of this sort of thing is in the air of the establishment.

Not, perhaps, on Sally’s part. Young people who have not seen Death face-to-face have little real conception of his horrible unmasked intrusion into the house of Life. That house is to them almost as inviolable as the home of our babyhood was to the most of us, a sacred fane under the protection of an omnipotent high-priest and priestess—papa and mamma. Almost as inviolable, that is, when those who live in it are our friends. Of course, the people in the newspapers go dying—are even killed in railway accidents. This frame of mind will change for Sally when she has seen this patient die. For the time being, she is half insensible—can think of other things.

“ What did the party mean that let me in, mother darling ? The fusty party ? She said she thought it was the Major. I didn’t take any notice till now. I wanted to get up.”



“It was the other Major, dear—Major Roper. Don’t you know? *He* used to talk of him, and say he was an old gossip.” In the dropped voice and the stress on the pronoun one can hear how the speaker’s mind knows that the old Colonel is almost part of the past. “But they were very old friends. They were together through the Mutiny. *He* was his commanding officer.” Sally’s eyes rest on the old sabre that hangs on its hook in the wall, where she has often seen it, ranking it prosaically with the other furnishings of “the Major’s” apartment. Now, a new light is on it, and it becomes a reality in a lurid past, long, long before there was any Sally. A past of muzzle-loading guns and Minié rifles, of forced marches through a furnace-heat to distant forts that hardly owned the name, all too late to save the remnant of their defenders; a past of a hundred massacres and a thousand heroisms; a past that clings still, Sally dear, about the memory of us oldsters that had to know it, as we would fain that no things that are, or are to be should ever cling about yours. But you have read the story often, and the tale of it grows and lives round the old sabre on the wall.

Except as an explanation of the fusty party’s reference to a Major, Old Jack—that was Sally’s Major’s name for him—got very little foothold in her mind, until a recollection of her mother’s allusion to him as an old gossip having made her look for a suitable image to place there, she suddenly recalled that it was he that had actually seen her father; talked to him in India twenty years ago; could, and no doubt would, tell her all about the divorce. But there!—she couldn’t speak to him about it here and now. It was impossible.

Still, she was curious to see him, and the fusty but genteel one had evidently expected him. So, during the remainder of what seemed to Sally the darkest day, morally and atmospherically, that she had ever spent—all but the bright morning when she ran into the fog somewhere near Surbiton, full of tales to tell of the house-party that now seemed a happy dream—during this gloomy remainder Sally wondered what could have happened that the other Major should not have turned up. The fog would have been more than enough to account for any ordinary non-appearance; hardly for this one.

For it turned out, as soon as it got full powers to assert itself, the densest fog on record. The Londoner was in his element. He told the dissatisfied outsider with pride of how at midday it had been impossible to read large pica on Ludgate Hill; he

didn't say why he tried to do so. He retailed frightful stories—but always with a sense of distinction—of folk crushed under hoofs and cart-wheels. If one half were true, some main thoroughfares must have been paved with flattened pedestrians. The satisfaction he derived from the huge extra profits of the gas-companies made his hearer think he must be a shareholder, until *pari passu* reasoning proved him to have invested in fog-signals. His legends of hooligans preying on the carcasses of strangled earls undisturbed had a set-off in others of marauders who had rushed into the arms of the police and thought them bosom friends; while that of an ex-Prime Minister who walked round and round for an hour, and then rang at a house to ask where he was, ended in consolation, as the door was opened by his own footman, who told him he wasn't at home. Exact estimates were current, most unreasonably, of the loss to commerce; so much so that the other Londoner corrected him positively with, "Nearer three-quarters of a million, they say," and felt proud of his higher knowledge. But neither felt the least ashamed, nor the least afraid of the hideous, inevitable future fog, when a suffocated population shall find, as it surely will, that it is at the bottom of a sea of unbreatheable air, instead of one that merely makes it choke its stomach up and kills an old invalid or two. On the contrary, both regarded it as the will of a judicious Providence, a developer of their own high moral qualities and a destroyer of their germs.

Bronchitis and asthma are kittle-cattle to shoe behind, even where the sweet Mediterranean air blows pure upon Rapallo and Nervi, but what manner of cattle are they in a London fog? Can they be shoed at all? As Mrs. Fenwick sits and waits in terror to hear the first inevitable cough as the old man wakes, and talks in whispers to her daughter in the growing darkness, she feels how her own breath drags at the tough air, and how her throat resents the sting of the large percentage of sulphur monoxide it contains. The gas-jet is on at the full—or rather the tap is, for the fish-tail burner doesn't realise its ideal. It sputters in its lurid nimbus—gets bronchitis on its own account, tries to cough its tubes clear and fails. Sally and her mother sit on in the darkness, and talk about it, shirking the coming suffocation of their old friend, and praying that his sleep may last till the deadly air lightens, be it ever so little. Sally's animated face shows that she is on a line of cogitation, and presently it fructifies.



"Suppose every one let their fires out, wouldn't the fog go ? It couldn't go on by itself."

"I don't know, chick. I suppose it's been all thought out by committees and scientific people. Besides, we should all be frozen."

"Not if we went to bed."

"What ! In the day-time ?"

"Better do nothing in bed than be choked, up."

"I dare say the fog wouldn't go away. You see, it's due to atmospheric conditions, so they say."

"That's only because nobody's there to stop 'em talking nonsense. Look at all that smoke going up our chimney." So it was, and a jolly blaze there was going to be when the three shovelfuls Sally had enthusiastically heaped on had incubated, and the time was ripe for the poker.

Had you been there you would have seen in Sally's face, as it caught the firelight-flicker and pondered on the cause of the fog, that *she* had not heard a choking fit of the poor old sleeper in the next room. And in her mother's that she *had*, and all the memory of the dreadful hours just passed. Her manner, too, was absent as she talked, and she listened constantly. Sally was to know what it was like soon. The opium sleep would end.

"Isn't that him ?" The mother's sharp ear of apprehension makes her say this ; the daughter has not heard the buried efforts of the lung that cannot cough. It will succeed directly, if the patient is raised up, so. Both have gone quickly and quietly into the sick-chamber, and it is the nurse who speaks. Her prediction is fulfilled, and the silent struggle of suffocation becomes a tearing convulsion that means to last some while and does it. How the old, thin tenement of life can go on living unkilld is a problem to solve. But it survives this time. Perhaps the new cough-mixture will make the job easier next time. We shall see.

Anyhow, this attack—bad as it was—has not been so bad as the one he had at three this morning. Rosalind and Nurse Emilia invent a paroxysm of diabolical severity, partly for the establishment of a pinnacle for themselves to look down on Sally from, partly for her consolation. He wasn't able to speak for ever so long after that, and this time he is trying to say something. . . .

"What is it, dear ?"

"Couldn't we have a window open to let a little air in ?"



Well!—we could have a window open. We could let a little air in—but only a very little. And that very little would bring with it copious percentages of moisture saturated with finely subdivided carbonaceous matter, of carbon dioxide, and sulphur dioxide, and traces of hydric chloride, who is an old friend of our youth, known to us then as muriatic acid.

“It’s such a thick fog, Major dear. As soon as it clears a little we’ll open the window. Won’t we, Sally?”

“Is Sally there? . . . Come and touch my hand, kitten. . . . That’s right. . . .” What is left of the Major can still enjoy the plump little white hand that takes the old fingers that once could grasp the sword that hangs on the wall. It will not be for very long now. A newspaper paragraph will soon give a short record of all the battles that sword left its scabbard to see, and will tell of its owner’s service in his later days as deputy-commissioner at Umritsur, and of the record of long residence in India it established, exceeding that of his next competitor by many years. Not a few old warriors that were in those battles, and many that knew his later time, will follow him beyond it very soon. But he is not gone yet, and his hand can just give back its pressure to Sally’s, as she sits by him, keeping her heart in and her tears back. The actual collapse of vital forces has not come—will not come for a few days. He can speak a little as she stoops to hear him.

“Young people like you ought to be in bed, chick, getting beauty-sleep. You must go home, and make your mother go. . . . *You go. I shall be all right. . . .*”

“It isn’t night, Major dear”—Sally makes a paltry attempt to laugh—“it’s three in the afternoon. It’s the fog.” But she cannot hear what he says in answer to this, go close as she may. After a pause of rest he tries again, with raised voice:

“Roper—Roper—Old Jack . . . mustn’t come . . . asthma in the fog . . . somebody go to stop him.” He is quite clear headed, and when Sally says she will go at once, he spots the only risk she would run, being young and healthy:

“Sure you can find your way? Over the club-house—Hurkaru Club——” And then is stopped by a threat of returning cough.

But Sally knows all about it, and can find her way anywhere—so she says. She is off in a twinkling, leaving her mother and the nurse to wait for the terrible attack that means to come, in due course, as soon as the new cough-mixture gets tired.

Sally is a true Londoner. *She* won't admit, whoever else does, that a fog is a real evil. On the contrary, she inclines to Prussian tactics—flies in the face of adverse criticism with the decision that a fog is rather a lark when you're out in it. Actually face to face with a human creature choking, Sally's optimism had wavered. It recovers itself in the bracing atmosphere of a main-thoroughfare charged to bursting with lines of vehicles, any one of which would go slowly alone, but the collective slowness of which finds a vent in a deadlock a mile away—an hour before we can move, we here.

By what human agency it comes about that any wheeled vehicle drawn of horses can thunder at a hand-gallop through the matrix of such a deadlock, heaven only knows! But the glare of the lamps of the fire-brigade, hot upon the wild excitement of their war-cry, shows that this particular agglomeration of brass and copper, fraught with suppressed energy of steam well up, means to try for it—seems to have had some success already, in fact. It quite puts Sally in spirits—the rapid *crescendo* of the hissing steam, the gleaming boiler-dome that might be the fruitful mother of all the helmets that hang about her skirts, the sudden leaping of the whole from the turgid opacity behind and equally sudden disappearance into the void beyond, the vanishing “Fire!” cry from which all consonants have gone, leaving only a sound of terror, all confirm her view of the fog as a lark. For, you see, Sally believed the Major might pull through even now.

Also the coming of the engine relieved her from what threatened to become a permanent embarrassment. A boy, who may have been a good boy or may not, had attached himself to her, under pretext of either a strong organ of locality or an extensive knowledge of town.

“Take yer ’most anywhere for fourpence! Anywheres yer like to name. ’Ammersmith, ’Ackney Wick, Noo Cross, Covent Garden Market, Regency Park. Come, I say, Missis!”

Sally shouldn't have shaken her head as she did. She ought to have ignored his existence. He continued:

“I don't mind makin' it thruppence to the Regency Park. Come, missis, I say! Think what a little money for the distance. How would *you* like to do it yourself?” Sally rashly allowed herself to be led into controversy.

“I tell you I don't want to go to Regent's Park.” But the boy passed this protest by—ignored it.



“ You won’t get no better oarfer. You ask any of the boys. They’ll tell you all alike. Regency Park for thruppence. Or, lookey here now, missis! You make it acrorst Westminster Bridge, and I’ll say twopence-’a’penny. Come now! Acrorst a bridge!” This boy had quite lost sight of the importance of selecting a destination with reference to its chooser’s life-purposes, in his contemplation of the advantages of being professionally conducted to it. Sally was not sorry when the coming of the fire-engine distracted his attention, and led to his disappearance in the fog.

Pedestrians must have been stopping at home to get a breath of fresh air indoors, as the spectres that shot out of the fog, to become partly solid and vanish again in an instant, seemed to come always one at a time.

“ Can you tell me, sir ”—Sally is addressing a promising spectre, an old gentleman of sweet aspect—“ have I passed the Hurkaru Club ?” The spectre helps an imperfect hearing with an ear-covering outspread hand, and Sally repeats her question.

“ I hope so, my dear,” he says, “ I hope so. Because if you haven’t, I have. I wonder where we are. What’s this ?” He pats a building at its reachable point—a stone balustrade at a step corner. “ Why, here we are! This is the Club. Can I do anything for you ?”

“ I want Major Roper ”—and then, thinking more explanation asked for, adds—“ who wheezes.” It is the only identification she can recall from Tishy’s conversation and her mother’s description. She herself had certainly seen their subject once from a distance, but she had only an impression of something purple. She could hardly offer that as identification.

“ Old Jack! He lives in a kennel at the top. Mulberry, tell Major Roper lady for him. Yes, better send your card up, my dear; that’s right!”

By this time they are in a lobby full of fog, in which electric light spots are showing their spiritless nature. Mulberry, who is like Gibbon the historian painted in carmine (a colour which clashes with his vermilion lappets) incites a youth to look sharp; also, to take that card up to Major Roper. As the boy goes upstairs with it two steps at a time Sally follows the old gentleman into a great saloon with standing desks to read skewered journals on and is talking to him on the hearthrug. She thinks she knows who he is.

“ I came to stop Major Roper coming round to see *our* Major



—Colonel Lund, I mean. It isn't fit for him to come out in the fog."

"Of course, it isn't. And Lund mustn't come out at his age. Why, he's older than I am.... What? Very ill with bronchitis? I heard he'd been ailing, but they said he was all right again. Are you his Rosey?"

"No, no; mamma's that! She's more the age, you know. I'm only twenty."

"Ah dear! how one forgets! Of course, but he's bad, I'm afraid."

"He's very bad. Oh, General Pellew—because I know it's you—his cough is so dreadful, and there's no air for him because of this nasty fog! Poor mamma's there, and the nurse. I ought to hurry back; but he wanted to prevent Major Roper coming round and getting worse himself; so we agreed for me to come. I'll just give my message and get back."

"Your mamma was Mrs. Graythorpe. I remember her at Umballa years ago. I know; she changed her name to Nightingale. She is now Mrs....?" Sally supplied her mother's married name. "And you," continued Lord Pellew, "were Baby Graythorpe on the boat."

"Of course. You came home with Colonel Lund; he's told me about that. Wasn't I a handful?" Sally is keenly interested.

"A small handful. You see, you made an impression. I knew you before, though. You had bitten me at Umballa."

"He's told me about that, too. Isn't that Major Roper coming now?" If it is not, it must be some one exactly like him, who stops to swear at somebody or something at every landing. He comes down by instalments. Till the end of the last one, conversation may continue. Sally wants to know more about her *trajet* from India—to take the testimony of an eyewitness. "Mamma says always I was in a great rage because they wouldn't let me go overboard and swim."

"I couldn't speak to that point. It seems likely, though. I always want to jump overboard now, but reason restrains me. You were not reasonable at that date."

"It is funny, though, that I have got so fond of swimming since. I'm quite a good swimmer."

Major Roper is by this time manifest volcanically at the bottom of the staircase, but before he comes in Lord Pellew has time to say so is his nasturtium granddaughter a good swimmer.

He has thirteen, and has christened each of them after a flower. He hopes thirteen isn't unlucky, and then Major Roper comes in apologetic. Sally can just recollect having seen him before, and thinks him as purple as ever.

"Lund—er !—Lund—er !—Lund—er !—Lund," he begins ; each time he says the name being baffled by a gasp, but holding tight to Sally's hand, as though to make sure of her staying till he gets a chance. He gets none, apparently, for he gives it up, whatever he was going to say, with the hand, and says instead, in a lucky scrap of intermediate breath : " I was comin' round—just comin'—only no gettin' those dam boots on !" And then becomes convulsively involved in an apology for swearing before a young lady. She, for her part, has no objection to his damning his boots if he will take them off, and not go out. This she partly conveys, and then, after a too favourable brief report of the patient's state—inevitable under the circumstances—she continues :

" That's what I came on purpose to say, Major Roper. You're not to come out on any account in the fog. Colonel Lund wouldn't be any the better for your coming, because he'll think of you going back through the fog, and he'll fret. Please do give up the idea of coming until it clears. Besides, he isn't my grandfather." An inconsecutive finish to correct a mistake of Old Jack's. She resumes the chair she had risen from when he came in, and thereupon he, suffering fearfully from having no breathing-apparatus and nothing to use it on, makes concession to a chair himself, but all the while waves a stumpy finger to keep Sally's last remark alive till his voice comes. The other old soldier remains standing, but somewhat on Sally's other side, so that she does not see both at once. A little voice, to be used cautiously, comes to the Major in time.

" Good Lard, my dear—excuse—old chap, you know !—why, good Lard, what a fool I am ! Why, I knoo your father in India."

But he stops suddenly, to Sally inexplicably. She does not see that General Pellew has laid a finger of admonition on his lips.

" I never saw my father," she says. It is a kind of formula of hers which covers all contingencies with most people. This time she does not want it to deadlock the conversation, which is what it usually serves for, so she adds : " You really knew him ?"

"Hardly knoo," is the reply. "Put it I met him two or three times, and you'll about toe the line for a start. Goin' off at that, we soon come up to my knowin' the Colonel's not your grandfather." Major Roper does not get through the whole of the last word—asthma forbids it—but his meaning is clear. Only, Sally is a direct Turk, as we have seen, and likes clearing up things.

"You know my friend Lætitia Wilson's mother, Major Roper?" The Major expresses not only that he does, but that his respectful homage is due to her as a fine woman—even a queenly one—by kissing his finger-tips and raising his eyes to Heaven. "Well, Lætitia (Tishy, I call her) says you told her mother you knew my father in India, and went out tiger-hunting with him, and he shot a tiger two hundred yards off and gave you the skin." Sally lays stress on the two hundred yards as a means of identification of the case. No doubt the Major owned many skins, but shot at all sorts of distances.

It is embarrassing for the old boy, because he cannot ignore General Pellew's intimations over Sally's head, which she does not see. He is to hold his tongue—that is their meaning. Yes, but when you have made a mistake, it may be difficult to begin holding it in the middle. Perhaps it would have been safer to lose sight of the subject in the desert of asthma, instead of reviving it the moment he got to an oasis.

"Some misunderstandin'," said he, when he could speak. "I've got a tiger-skin the man who shot it gave me out near Nagpore, but he wasn't your father." How true that was!

"Do you remember his name?" Sally wants him to say it was Palliser again, to prove it all nonsense, but a warning finger of the old General makes him desperate, and he selects, as partially true, the supposed alias which—do you remember all this?—he had ascribed to the tiger-shooter in his subsequent life in Australia.

"Perfectly well. His name was Harrison. A fine shot. He went away to Australia after that."

Sally laughs out. "How very absurd of Tishy!" she says. "She hadn't even got the name you said right. *She* said it was Palliser. It sounds like Harrison." She stopped to think a minute. "But even if she had said it right it wouldn't be my father, because his name, you know, was Graythorpe—like mine before we both changed to Nightingale—mother and I. We did, you know."



Old Jack assents to this with an expenditure of breath not warranted where breath is so scarce. He cannot say "of course," and that he recollects, too often. Perhaps he is glad to get on a line of veracity. The General says "of course," also. "Your mother, my dear, was Mrs. Graythorpe when I knew her at Umballa and on the boat." Both these veterans call Sally "my dear," and she doesn't resent it.

But her message is really given, and she ought to get back. She succeeds in finally overruling Major Roper's scheme of coming out into the fog, which has contrived to get blacker still during this conversation; but has more trouble with the other old soldier. She only overcomes that victor in so many battle-fields by representing that if he does see her safe to Hill Street *she* will be miserable if she doesn't see *him* safe back to the club. "And then," she adds, "we shall go on till doomsday. Besides, I *am* young and sharp!" At which the old General laughs, and says isn't *he*? Ask his granddaughters! Sally says no, he isn't, and she can't have him run over to please anybody. However, he will come out to see her off, though Old Jack must do as he's told, and stop indoors. He watches the little figure vanish in the fog, with a sense of the merry eyebrows in the pretty shoulders, like the number of a cab fixed on behind.

When General Pellew had seen Sally out, to the great relief of Gibbon of the various reds in the lobby, he returned and drew a chair for himself beside Major Roper, who still sat, wrestling with the fog, where he had left him.

"What a dear child! . . . Oh yes; she'll be all right. Take better care of herself than I should of her. She would only have been looking after me, to see that I didn't get run over." He glanced round and dropped his voice, leaning forward to the Major. "She must never be told."

"You're right, Pelloo! Dam mistake of mine to say! I'm a dam mutton-headed old gobblestick! No better!" We give up trying to indicate the Major's painful interruptions and struggles. Of course, he might have saved himself a good deal by saying no more than was necessary. General Pellew was much more concise and to the purpose.

"*Never* be told. I see one thing. Her mother has told her little or nothing of the separation."

"No! Dam bad business! Keep it snug's the word."

"You saw she had no idea of the name. It *was* Palliser, wasn't it?"

"Unless it was Verschoyle." Major Roper only says this to convince himself that he might have forgotten the name—a sort of washy palliation of his Harrison invention. It brings him within a measurable distance of a clear conscience.

"No, it wasn't Verschoyle. I remember the Verschoyle case." By this time Old Jack is feeling quite truthful. "It *was* Palliser, and it's not for me to blame him. He only did what you or I might have done—any man. A bit hot-headed, perhaps. But look here, Roper...."

The General dropped his voice, and went on speaking almost in a whisper, but earnestly, for more than a minute. Then he raised it again.

"It was that point. If you say a word to the girl, or begin giving her any information, and she gets the idea you can tell her more, she'll just go straight for you and say she must be told the whole. I can see it in her eyes. And *you can't tell her the whole*. You know you can't!"

The Major fidgeted visibly. He knew he should go round to learn about his old friend (it was barely a quarter of a mile) as soon as the least diminution of the fog gave him an excuse. And he was sure to see Sally. He exaggerated her age. "The gyairl's twenty-two," said he weakly. The General continued:

"I'm only speaking, mind you, on the hypothesis.... I'm supposing the case to have been what I told you just now. Otherwise, you could work the telling of it on the usual lines—unfaithfulness, estranged affections, desertion—all the respectable produceable phrases. But as for making that little Miss Nightingale *understand*—that is, without making her life unbearable to her—it can't be done, Major. It can't be done, old chap!"

"I see your game. I'll tell her to ask her mother."

"It can't be done that way. I hope the child's safe in the fog." The General embarked on a long pause. There was plenty of time—more time than he had (so his thought ran) when his rear-guard was cut off by the Afridis in the Khyber Pass. But then the problem was not so difficult as telling this live girl how she came to be one—telling her, that is, without poisoning her life and shrouding her heart in a fog as dense as the one that was going to make the street-lamps outside futile when night should come to help it—telling her without dashing

the irresistible glee of those eyebrows and quenching the smile that opened the casket of pearls that all who knew her thought of her by.

Both old soldiers sat on to think it out. The older one first recognised the insolubility of the problem. "It can't be done," said he. "Girls are not alike. She's too much like my nasturtium granddaughter now . . ."

"I shall have to tell her dam lies."

"That won't hurt you, Old Jack."

"I'm not complainin'."

"Besides, I shall have to tell 'em, too, as likely as not. You must tell me what you've told, so as to agree. I should go round to ask after Lund, only I promised to meet an old thirty-fifth man here at five. It's gone half-past. He's lost in the fog. But I can't go away till he comes." Old Jack is seized with an unreasoning sanguineness.

"The fog's clearin'," he says. "You'll see, it'll be quite bright in half-an-hour. Nothin' near so bad as it was, now. Just you look at that window."

The window in question, when looked at, was not encouraging. So far as could be seen at all through the turgid atmosphere of the room, it was a parallelogram of solid opacity crossed by a window-frame, with a hopeless tinge of Roman ochre. But Old Jack was working up to a fiction to serve a purpose. By the time he had succeeded in believing the fog was lifting he would be absolved from his promise not to go out in it. It was a trial of strength between credulity and the actual. The General looked at the window and asked a bystander what he thought, sir? Who felt bound to testify that he thought the prospect hopeless.

"You're allowin' nothin' for the time of day," said Major Roper, and his motive was transparent. Sure enough, after the General's friend had come for him, an hour late, the Major took advantage of the doubt whether absolute darkness was caused by fog or mere night, and in spite of all remonstrances, began pulling on his overcoat to go out. He even had the effrontery to appeal to the hall-porter to confirm his views about the state of things out of doors. Mr. Mulberry added his dissuasions with all the impressiveness of his official uniform and the cubic area of its contents. But even his powerful influence carried no weight in this case. It was useless to argue with the infatuated old boy, who was evidently very uneasy about Major



Lund, and suspected also that Miss Nightingale had not reported fair, in order to prevent him coming. He made himself into a perfect bolster with wraps, and put on a respirator. This damned thing, however, he took off again, as it impeded respiration, and then went out into the all but solid fog, gasping and choking frightfully, to feel his way to Hill Street and satisfy himself the best was being done for his old friend's bronchitis.

"They'll kill him with their dam nostrums," said he to the last member of the Club he spoke to, a chance ex-Secretary of State for India, whom he took into his confidence on the doorstep. "A little common-sense, sir—that's what's wanted in these cases. It's all very fine, sir, when the patient's young and can stand it...." His cough interrupted him, but he was understood to express that medical attendance was fraught with danger to persons of advanced years, and that in such cases his advice should be taken in preference to that of the profession. He recovered enough to tell Mulberry's subordinate to stop blowin' that dam whistle. There were cabs enough and to spare, he said, but they were affecting non-existence from malicious motives, and as a stepping-stone to ultimate rapacity. Then he vanished in the darkness, and was heard coughing till he turned a corner.

## CHAPTER XXIV

OLD JACK'S powers of self-delusion were great indeed if, when he started on his short journey, he really believed the fog had mended. At least, it was so dense that he might never have found his way without assistance. This he met with in the shape of a boy with a link, whom Sally at once identified from his description, given when the Major had succeeded in getting up the stairs and was resting in the sitting-room near the old sabre on the wall, wiping his eyes after his effort. Colonel Lund was half-unconscious after a bad attack, and it was best not to disturb him. Fenwick had not returned, and no one was very easy about him. But every one affirmed the reverse, and joined in a sort of Creed to the effect that the fog was clearing. It wasn't, and didn't mean to for some time. But the unanimity of the creed fortified the congregation, as in other cases. No two believers doubted it at once, just as no two Alpine climbers, strung together on the moraine of a glacier, lose their foothold at the same time.

"I know that boy," said Sally. "His nose twists, and gives him a presumptuous expression, and he has a front tooth out and puts his tongue through. Also his trousers are tied on with string."

"Everlastin' young beggar, if ever there was one," says the old soldier, in a lucid interval when speech is articulate. But he is allowing colloquialism to run riot over meaning. No everlasting person can ever have become part of the past if you think of it. He goes on to say that the boy has had twopence and is to come back for fourpence in an hour, or threepence if you can see the gas-lamps, because then a link will be superfluous. Sally recognises the boy more than ever.

"I wonder," she says, "if he's waiting outside. Because the party of the house might allow him inside. Do you think I could ask, mother?"

"You might *try*, kitten," is the reply, not given sanguinely. And Sally goes off, benevolent. "Even when your trousers are tied up with string, a fog's a fog," says she to herself.

"I knoo our friend Lund first of all . . ." Thus the Major, nodding towards the bedroom door . . . "why, God bless my soul, ma'am, I knew Lund first of all, forty-six years ago in Delhi. Forty—six—years ! And all that time, if you believe me, he's been the same obstinate moole. Never takin' a precaution about anythin', nor listening to a word of advice !" This is about as far as he can go without a choke. Rosalind goes into the next room to get a tumbler of water. The nurse, who is sitting by the fire, nods towards the bed, and Rosalind goes close to it to hear. "What is it, dear ?" She speaks to the invalid as to a little child.

"Isn't that Old Jack choking ? I know his choke. What does he come out for in weather like this ? What does he mean ? Send him back. . . . No, send him in here." The nurse puts in a headshake as protest. But for all that, Sally finds, when she returns, that the two veterans are contending together against their two enemies, bronchitis and asthma, with the Intelligence Department sadly interrupted, and the enemy in possession of all the advantageous points.

"He oughtn't to try to talk," says Rosalind. "But he will." She and Sally and the nurse sit on in the fog-bound front room. The gas-lights have no heart in them, and each wears a nimbus. Rosalind wishes Gerry would return, aloud. Sally is buoyant about him : *he's* all right, trust *him* ! What about the everlasting young beggar ?

"I persuaded Mrs. Kindred," says Sally. "And we looked outside for him, and he'd gone."

"Fancy a woman being named Kindred !"

"When people are so genteel one can believe anything ! But what do you think the boy's name is ? . . . Chancellorship ! Isn't that queer ? She knows him—says he's always about in the neighbourhood. He sleeps in the mews behind Great Toff House."

Her mother isn't listening. She rises for a moment to hear what she may of how the talk in the next room goes on ; and then, coming back, says again she wishes Gerry was safe indoors, and Sally again says, "Oh, *he's* all right !" The confidence these two have in one another makes them a couple apart—a sort of league.



What Mrs. Fenwick heard a scrap of in the next room would have been, but for the alarums and excursions of the two enemies aforementioned, a consecutive conversation as follows :

“ You’re gettin’ round, Colonel ?”

“ A deal better, Major. I want to speak to *you*.”

“ Fire away, old Cockywax ! You remember Hopkins ?—Cartwright Hopkins—man with a squint—at Mooltan—expression of his, ‘ Old Cockywax.’ ”

“ I remember him. Died of typhoid at Burrampore. Now you listen to me, old chap, and don’t talk—you only make yourself cough.”

“ It’s only the dam fog. *I’m* all right.”

“ Well, shut up. That child in the next room—it’s her I want to talk about. You’re the only man, as far as I know, that knows the story. She doesn’t. She’s not to be told.”

“ Mum’s the word, sir. Always say nothin’, that’s my motto. Penderfield’s daughter at Khopal—at least, he was her father. One damn father’s as good as another, as long as he goes to the devil.” This may be a kind of disclaimer of inheritance as a factor to be reckoned with, an obscure suggestion that human parentage is without influence on character. It is not well expressed.

“ Listen to me, Roper. You know the story. That’s the only man I can’t say God forgive him to. God forgive *me*, but I can’t.”

“ Devil take me if I can ! . . . Yes, it’s all right. They’re all in the next room. . . . ”

“ But the woman was worse. She’s living, you know. . . . ”

“ I know—shinin’ light—purifying society—that’s her game ! I’d purify *her*, if I had my way.”

“ Come a bit nearer—my voice goes. I’ve thought it all out. If the girl, who supposes herself to be the daughter of her mother’s husband, tries to run you into a corner—you understand ?”

“ I understand.”

“ Well, don’t you undeceive her. Her mother has never told her *anything*. She doesn’t suppose she had any hand in the divorce. She thinks his name was Graythorpe, and doesn’t know he wasn’t her father. Don’t you undeceive her—promise.”

But the speaker is so near the end of his tether that the Major has barely time to say, “ Honour bright, Colonel,” when the bronchial storm bursts. It may be that the last new anodyne,

which is warranted to have all the virtues and none of the ill-effects of opium, had also come to the end of *its* tether. Mrs. Fenwick came quickly in, saying he had talked too much ; and Sally, following her, got Major Roper away, leaving the patient to her mother and the nurse. The latter knew what it would be with all this talking—now the temperature would go up, and he would have a bad night, and what would Dr. Mildmay say ?

Till the storm had subsided and a new dose of the sedative had been given, Sally and Old Jack stood waiting in sympathetic pain—you know what it is when you can do nothing. The latter derived some insignificant comfort from suggestions through his own choking that all this was due to neglect of his advice. When only moans and heavy breathing were left, Sally went back into the bedroom. Her mother was nursing the poor old racked head on her bosom, with the sword-hand of the days gone by in her own. She said without speaking that he would sleep presently, and the fewer in the room the better, and Sally left them so, and went back.

Yes, the Major would take some toddy before he started for home. And it was all ready, lemons and all, in the black polished wood cellaret, with eagles' claws for feet. Sally got the ingredients out and began to make it. But first she gently closed the door between the rooms, to keep the sound of their voices in.

"You really did see my father, though, Major?" There seemed to be a good deal of consideration before the answer came, not all to be accounted for by asthma.

"Yes—certainly—oh yes. I saw Mr. Graythorpe once or twice. Another spoonful—that's plenty." A pause.

"Now, don't spill it. Take care, it's very hot. That's right." Another pause. "Major Roper. . . ."

"Yes, my dear. What?"

"Do tell me what he was like."

"Have you never seen his portrait?"

"Mother burnt it while I was small. She told me. Do tell me what you recollect him like."

"Fine handsome feller—well set up. Fine shot, too! Gad! that was a neat thing! A bullet through a tiger two hundred yards off just behind the ear."

"But I thought *his* name was Harrison." The Major has got out of his depth entirely through his own rashness. Why

couldn't he leave that tiger alone ? Now he has to get into safe water again.

A good long choke is almost welcome at this moment. While it goes on he can herald, by a chronic movement of a raised finger, his readiness to explain all as soon as it stops. He catches at his first articulation, so that not a moment may be lost. There were *two* tigers—that's the explanation. Harrison shot one, and Graythorpe the other. The cross-examiner is dissatisfied.

"Which was the one that shot the tiger two hundred yards off, just behind the ear ?"

The old gentleman responds with a spirited decision : "Your father, my dear, your father. That tiger round at my rooms—show it you if you like—that skin was given me by a feller named Harrison, in the Commissariat—quite another sort of Johnny. He was down with the Central Indian Horse—quite another place !" He dwells on the inferiority of this shot, the smallness of the skin, the close contiguity of its owner. A very inferior affair !

But, being desperately afraid of blundering again, he makes the fact he admits, that he had confoozed between the two cases, a reason for a close analysis of the merits of each. This has no interest for Sally, who, indeed, had only regarded the conversation, so far, as a stepping-stone she now wanted to leap to the mainland from. After all, here she is face-to-face with a man who actually knows the story of the separation, and can talk of it without pain. Why should she not get something from him, however little ? You see, the idea of a something that could not be told was necessarily foreign to a mind some somethings could not be told to. But she felt it would be difficult to account to Major Roper for her own position. The fact that she knew nothing proved that her mother and Colonel Lund had been anxious she should know nothing. She could not refer to an outsider over their heads. Still, she hoped, as Major Roper was deemed on all hands an arrant old gossip, that he might accidentally say something to enlighten her. She prolonged the conversation in this hope.

"Was that before I was born ?"

"The tiger-shootin' ? Well, reely, my dear, I shouldn't like to say. It's twenty years ago, you see. No, I couldn't say—couldn't say when it was." He is beginning to pack himself in a long woollen scarf an overcoat with fur facings will shortly cover in, and is, in fact, preparing to evacuate a position he finds



untenable. "I must be thinkin' of gettin' home," he says. Sally tries for a word more.

"Was it before he and mother fell out?" It is on the Major's lips to say, "Before the proceedings?" but he changes the expression.

"Before the split? Well, no; I should say after the split. Yes—probably after the split." But an unfortunate garrulity prompts him to say more. "After the split, I should say, and before the——"—and then he feels he is in a quagmire, and flounders to the nearest land—"before your father went away to Australia." Then he discerns his own feebleness, recognising the platitude of this last remark. For nobody could shoot tigers in an Indian jungle after he had gone off to Australia. Clearly the sooner he gets away the better.

A timely choking-fit interposes to preserve its victim from further questioning. The patient in the next room is asleep or torpid, so he omits farewells. Sally's mother comes out to say good-night, and Sally goes down the staircase with him and his asthma, feeling that it is horrible and barbarous to turn him out alone in the dense blackness. Perhaps, however, the peculiar boy with the strange name will be there. That would be better than nothing. Sally feels there is something indomitable about that boy, and that fog nourishes and stimulates it.

But, alas!—there is no boy. And yet it certainly would be fourpence if he came back. For, though it may be possible to see the street gas-lamps without getting inside the glass, you can't see them from the pavement. Nevertheless, the faith that "it" is clearing having been once founded, lives on itself in the face of evidence, even as other faiths have done before now. So the creed is briefly recited, and the Major disappears with the word good-night still on his lips, and his cough, gasp, or choke dies away in the fog as he vanishes.

Somebody is whistling "Arr-hyd-y-nos" as he comes from the other side in the darkness—somebody who walks with a swinging step and a resonant foot-beat, some one who cares nothing for fogs. Fenwick's voice is defiant of it, exhilarated and exhilarating, as he ceases to be a cloud and assumes an outline. Sally gives a kiss to frozen hair that crackles.

"What's the kitten after, out in the cold? How's the Major?"

"Which? *Our* Major? He's a bit better, and the temperature's lower." Sally believed this; a little thermometer thing

was being wielded as an implement of optimism, and had lent itself to delusions.

“Oh, how scrunchy you are, your hands are all ice! Mamma’s been getting in a stew about *you*, squire.” On which Fenwick, with the slightest of whistles, passes Sally quickly and goes four steps at a time up the stairs, still illuminated by Sally’s gas-waste. For she had left the lights at full cock all the way up.

“My dearest, you never got my telegram?” This is to Rosalind, who has come out on the landing to meet him. But the failure of the telegram—lost in the fog, no doubt—is a small matter. What shelves it is the patient grief on the tired, handsome face Fenwick finds tears on as he kisses it. Sally has the optimism all to herself now. Her mother knows that her old friend and protector will not be here long—that, of course, has been true some time. But there’s the suffering, present and to come.

“We needn’t stop the chick hoping a little still if she likes.” She says it in a whisper. Sally is on the landing below; she hears the whispering, and half guesses its meaning. Then she suppresses the last gas-tap, and follows on into the front room, where the three sit talking in undertones for perhaps an hour.

Yes, that monotonous sound is the breathing of the patient in the next room, under the new narcotic which has none of the bad effects of opium. The nurse is there watching him, and wondering whether it will be a week, or twenty-four hours. She derives an impression from something that the fog really is clearing at last, and goes to the window to see. She is right, for at a window opposite are dimly visible, from the candles on either side of the mirror, two white arms that are “doing” the hair of a girl whose stays are much too tight. She is dressing for late dinner or an early party. Then the nurse, listening, understands that the traffic has been roused from its long lethargy. “I thought I heard the wheels,” she says to herself. Then Sally also becomes aware of the sound in the traffic, and goes to *her* window in the front room.

“You see I’m right,” she says. “The people are letting their fires out, and the fog’s giving. Now I’m going to take you home, Jeremiah.” For the understanding is that these two shall return to Krakatoa Villa, leaving Rosalind to watch with the nurse. She will get a chop in half an hour’s time. She can sleep on the



sofa in the front room if she feels inclined. All which is duty carried out or arranged for.

After her supper Rosalind sat on by herself before the fire in the front-room. She did not want to be unsociable with the nurse; but she wanted to think, alone. A weight was on her mind; the thought that the dear old friend, who had been her father and refuge, should never know that she again possessed her recovered husband on terms almost as good as if that deadly passage in her early life had never blasted the happiness of both. He would die, and it would have made him so happy to know it. Was she right in keeping it back now? Had she ever been right?

But if she told him now, the shock of the news might hasten his collapse. Sudden news need not be bad to cause sudden death. And, maybe, the story would be too strange for him to grasp. Better be silent. But oh! if he might have shared her happiness!

Drowsiness was upon her before she knew it. Better perhaps sleep a little now, while he was sleeping. She looked in at him, and spoke to the nurse. He lay there like a lifeless waxwork—blown through, like an apparatus out of order, to simulate breath, and doing it badly. How could he sleep when now and then it jerked him so? He could, and she left him and lay down, and went suddenly to sleep. After a time that was a journey through a desert, without landmarks, she was as suddenly waked.

“What?... I thought you spoke...” And so some one had spoken, but not to her. She started up, and went to where the nurse was conversing through the open window with an inarticulate person in the street below, behind the thick window-curtain she had kept overlapped, to check the freezing air.

“What is it?”

“It’s a boy. I can’t make out what he says.”

“Let me come!” But Rosalind gets no nearer his meaning. She ends up with, “I’ll come down,” and goes. The nurse closes the window and goes back to the bedroom.

The street door opens easily, the Chubb lock being the only fastening. The moment Rosalind sees the boy near she recognises him. There is no doubt about the presumptuous expression, or the cause of it. Also, the ostentatious absence of the front tooth, clearly accounting for inaudibility at a distance.

“What do you want?” asks Rosalind.



"Nothin' at all for myself. I come gratis, I did. There's a many wouldn't." He is not too audible, even now; but he would be better if he did not suck the cross-rail of the area paling.

"Why did you come?"

"To bring you the nooze. The old bloke's a friend of yours, missis. Or p'raps he ain't! I can mizzle, you know, and no harm done."

"Oh no, don't mizzle on any account. Tell me about the old bloke. Do you mean Major Roper?"

"Supposin' I do, why shouldn't I?" This singular boy seems to have no way of communicating with his species except through defiances and refutations. Rosalind accepts his question as an ordinary assent, and does not make the mistake of entering into argument.

"Is he ill?" The boy nods. "Is he worse?" Another nod. "Has he gone home to his club?" The boy evidently has a revelation to make, but would consider it undignified to make it except as a denial of something to the contrary. He sees his way after a brief reflection.

"He ain't gone. He's been took."

"He's been taken? How has he been taken?"

"On a perambulance. Goin' easy! But he didn't say nothin'. Not harf a word!"

"Had he fainted?" But this boy has another characteristic—when he cannot understand he will not admit it. He keeps silence, and goes on absorbing the railing. Rosalind asks further: "Was he dead?"

"It'd take a lawyer to tell that, missis."

"I can't stand here in the cold, my boy. Come in, and come up and tell us." So he comes up, and Rosalind speaks to the nurse in the other room, who comes; and then they turn seriously to getting the boy's story.

He is all the easier for examination from the fact that he is impressed, if not awed, by his surroundings. All the bounce is knocked out of him, now that his foot is no longer on his native heath, the street. Witness that the subject of his narrative, who would certainly have been the old bloke where there was a paling to suck, has become a simple pronoun, and no more!

"I see him afore, missis," he says. "That time wot I lighted him round for twopence. And he says to come again in three-quarters of an hour. And I says yes, I says. And he says not

to be late. Nor yet I shouldn't, only the water run so slow off the main, and I was kep. . . . Yes, missis—a drorin' of it off in their own pails at the balkny house by the mews, where the supply is froze. . . .”

“I see, you got a job to carry up pails of water from that thing that sticks up in the road?”

“Yes, missis; by means of the turncock. Sim'lar I got wet. But I didn't go to be late. It warn't much, in the manner of speakin'. I was on his 'eels, clost.”

“You caught him?”

“Heard him hoarckin' in the fog, and I says to my mate—boy by the name of 'Ucklebridge, only chiefly called Slimy, to distinguish him—I says—I says that was my guv'nor, safe and square, by the token of the sound of it. And then I catches him up in the fog, follerin' by the sound. My word, missis, he *was* bad! Wanted to holler me over the coals, he did, for being behind my time. I could hear him wantin' to do it. But he couldn't come by the breath.”

Poor Old Jack! The two women look at each other, and then say to the boy: “Go on.”

“Holdin' by the palins, he was, and goin' slow. Then he choked it off like, and got a chanst for a word, and he says: ‘Now, you young see-saw’—that's what he said, missis, ‘see-saw’—‘just you stir your stumps and cut along to the clubbus, and tell that dam red-faced fool Mulberry to look sharp and send one of the young fellers to lend an arm, and not to come hisself. And then he got out a little flat bottle of something short, and went for a nip; but the cough took him, and it sprouted over his wropper and was wasted.”

The women look at each other again. The nurse sees well into the story, and says quickly under her breath to Rosalind: “He'd been told what to do if he felt it coming. A drop of brandy might have made the difference.” The boy goes on as soon as he is waited for.

“Mr. Mulberry he come runnin' hisself, and a couple more on 'em! And then they all calls me a young varmint by reason of the guv'nor having got lost. But a gentleman what comes up, he says all go opposite ways, he says, and you'll hear him in the fog. So I runs up a parsage, and in the middle of the parsage I tumbles over the guv'nor lyin' acrost the parsage. Then I hollers, and then they come.”

“Oh dear!” says Rosalind; for this boy had that terrible

power of vivid description which flinches at no realism—*seems* to enjoy the horror of it ; does not really. Probably it was only his intense anxiety to communicate *all*, struggling with his sense of his lack of language—a privilege enjoyed by gov'nors. But Rosalind feels the earnestness of his brief epic. He winds it up :

" But the gov'nor, he'd done hoarckin'. Nor he never spoke. The gentleman I told you, he says leave him lyin' a minute, he says, and he runs. Then back he comes with the apoarthecary—him with the red light—and they rips the gov'nor's sleeve up, spilin' his coat. And they prokes into his arm with a packin'-needle. Much use it done ! And then they says, it warn't the fog, and I called 'em a liar. 'Cos it's a clearin' off, they says. It warn't, not much. I see the perambulance come, and they shoved him in, and I hooked it off, and heard 'em saying where's that young shaver, they says ; he'll be wanted for his testament. So I hooked it off."

" And where did you go ?"

" To a wisit on a friend, I did. Me and Slimy—him I mentioned afore. And he says, he says, to come on here—on'y later. So then I come on here."

Rosalind finds herself, in the face of what she feels must mean Old Jack's sudden death, thinking how sorry she is she can command no pair of trousers of a reasonable size to replace this boy's drenched ones—a pair that would need no string. A crude brew of hot toddy, and most of the cake that had appealed to Major Roper in vain, and never gone back to the cellaret, were the only consolations possible. They seemed welcome, but under protest.

" Shan't I carry of 'em outside, missis ?"

" On the stairs, then." This assent is really because both women believe he will be comfortabler there than in the room. " Where are you going to sleep ?" Rosalind asks, as he takes the cake and tumbler away to the stairs. She puts a gas-jet on half-cock.

" Twopenny doss in Spur Street, off of 'Orseferry Road, Westminster." This identification is to help Rosalind, as she may not be able to spot this particular doss-house among all she knows.

" Do you always sleep there ?"

" No, missis ! Weather permitting, in our mooze—on the 'eap. The 'orse-keeper gives a sack in return for a bit of cleanin', early, before comin' away."



“What are you?” says Rosalind. She is thinking aloud more than asking a question. But the boy answers:

“I’m a wife, I am. Never learned no tride, ye see! . . . Oh yes; I’ve been to school—board-school scollard. But they don’t learn you no tride. You parses your standards and chucks ’em.” This incredible boy, who deliberately called himself a waif (that was his meaning), was it possible that he had passed through a board-school? Well, perhaps he was the highest type of competitive examinee, who can learn everything and forget everything.

“But you have a father?”

“I could show him you. But he don’t hold with teachin’ his sons trides, by reason of their gettin’ some of his wiges. He’s in the sanitary engineering himself, but he don’t do no work.” Rosalind looks puzzled. “That’s his tride—sanitary engineering, lavatries, plumbin’, and fittin’. Been out of work better than three year. He can jint you off puppies’ tails, though, at a shillin’. But he don’t only get a light job now and again, ’cos the tride ain’t wot it was. They’ve been shearin’ of ’em off of late years. Thank you, missis.” The refreshments have vanished as by magic, and Rosalind gives the boy the rest of the cake and a coin, and he goes away presumably to the doss-house he smells so strong of, having been warmed, that a flavour of the heap in the mews would have been welcome in exchange. So Rosalind thinks as she opens the window a moment and looks out. She can quite see the houses opposite. The fog has cleared till the morning.

Perhaps it is the relenting of the atmospheric conditions, or perhaps it is the oxygen that the patient has been inhaling off and on, that has slightly revived him. Or perhaps it is the champagne that comes up through a tap in the cork, and reminds Rosalind’s ill-slept brain of something heard very lately—what on earth exactly was it? Oh, she knows! Of course, the thing in the street the sanitary engineer’s son drew the pails of water at for the house with the balcony. It is pleasanter to know; might have fidgeted her if she had not found out. But she is badly in want of sleep, that’s the truth!

“I thought Major Roper was gone, Rosey.” He can talk through his heavy breathing. It must be the purer air.

“So he is, dear. He went two hours ago.” She sits by him, taking his hand as before. The nurse is, by arrangement, to take her spell of sleep now.

"I suppose it's my head. I thought he was here just now—just this minute."

"No, dear; you've mixed him up with Gerry, when he came in to say good night. Major Roper went away first. It wasn't seven o'clock." But there is something excited and puzzled in the patient's voice as he answers—something that makes her feel creepy.

"Are you *sure*? I mean, when he came back into the room with his coat on."

"You were dreaming, dear! He never came back. He went straight away."

"Dreaming! Not a bit of it. You weren't here." He is so positive that Rosalind thinks best to humour him.

"I suppose I was speaking to Mrs. Kindred. What did he come back to say, dear?"

"Oh, nothing! At least, I had told him not to chatter to Sallykin about the old story, and he came back, I suppose, to say he wouldn't." He seemed to think the incident, as an incident, closed; but presently goes on talking about things that arise from it.

"Old Jack's the only one of them all that knew anything about it—that Sallykin is likely to come across. Pellew knew, of course; but he's not an old chatterbox like Roper."

Ought not Rosalind to tell the news that has just reached her? She asks herself the question, and answers it: "Not till he rallies, certainly. If he does not rally, why then——!" Why then he either will know or won't want to.

She has far less desire to tell him this than she has to talk of the identity of her husband. She would almost be glad, as he is to die—her old friend—that she should have some certainty beforehand of the exact time of his death, so that she might, only for an hour, have a companion in her secrecy. If only he and she might have borne the burden of it together! She reproached herself, now that it was too late, with her mistrust of his powers of retaining a secret. See how keenly alive he was to the need of keeping Sally's parentage in the dark! And *that* was what the whole thing turned on. Gerry's continued ignorance might be desirable, but was a mere flea-bite by comparison. In her strained, sleepless, overwrought state the wish that "the Major" should know of her happiness while they could still speak of it together grew from a passing thought of how nice it might have been, that could not be to a dumb.

dominant longing that it should be. Still, after all, the only fear was that he should talk to Gerry; and how easy to keep Gerry out of the room! And suppose he did talk! Would Gerry believe him? There was risky ground there, though.

She was not sorry when no more speech came through the heavy breathing of the invalid. He had talked a good deal, and a semi-stupor followed, relieving her from the strong temptation she had felt to lead him back to their past memories, and feel for some means of putting him in possession of the truth. As the tension on her mind grew less, she became aware this would have been no easy thing to do. Then, as she sat holding the old hand, and wondering that anything so frail could still keep in bond a spirit weary of its prison, drowsiness crept over her once more, all the sooner for the monotonous rhythm of the heavy breath. Consciousness gave place to a state of mysterious discomfort, complicated with intersecting strings and a grave sense of responsibility, and then to oblivion. After a few thousand years, probably minutes on the clock, a jerk woke her.

“Oh dear! I was asleep.”

“You might give me another nip of the champagne, Rosey dear. And then you must go and lie down. I shall be all right. Is it late?”

“Not very. About twelve. I’ll look at my watch.” She does so, and it is past one. Then the invalid, being raised up towards his champagne, has a sudden attack of coughing, which brings in the nurse as a reserve. Presently he is reinstated in semi-comfort, half a tone weaker, but with something to say. And so little voice to say it with! Rosalind puts her ear close, and repeats what she catches.

“Why did Major Roper come back? He didn’t, dear. He went away about seven, and has not been here since.”

“He was in the room just this minute.” The voice is barely audible, the conviction of the speaker absolute. He is wandering. The nurse’s mind decides, in an innermost recess, that it won’t be very long now.

Rosalind looked out through a spot she had rubbed clean on the frozen window-pane, and saw that it was bright starlight. The fog had gone. That boy—he was asleep at the twopenny doss, and the trousers were drying. What a good thing that he should be totally insensitive to atmosphere, as no doubt he was.



The hardest hours for the watcher by a sick-bed are those that cannot be convinced that they belong to the previous day. One o'clock may be coaxed or bribed easily enough into winking at a pretence that it is only a corollary of twelve; two o'clock protests against it audibly, and every quarter-chime endorses its claim to be to-morrow; three o'clock makes short work of an imposture only a depraved effrontery can endeavour to foist upon it. Rosalind was aware of her unfitness to sit up all night—all this next night—but nursed the pretext that it had not come, and that it was still to-day, until a sense of the morning chill, and something in the way the sound of each belated cab confessed to its own scarcity, convinced her of the uselessness of further effort. Then she surrendered the point, short of the stroke of three, and exchanged posts with the nurse, who promised to call her at once should it seem necessary to do so. Sleep came with a rush, and dreamless oblivion. Then, immediately, the hand of the nurse on her shoulder, and her voice, a sudden shock in the absolute stillness:

"I thought it better to wake you, Mrs. Nightingale. I am so sorry. . . ."

"Oh dear! how long have I slept?" Rosalind's mind leaped through a second of unconsciousness of where she is and what it's all about to a state of intense wakefulness. "What o'clock is it?"

"It's half-past six. I should have left you to have your sleep out, only he wanted you. . . . Yes, he woke up and asked for you, and then asked again. He's hardly coughed."

"I'll come." Rosalind tried for alacrity, but found she was quite stiff. The fire was only a remnant of red glow that collapsed feebly as the nurse touched it with the poker. It was a case for a couple of little gluey wheels, and a good contribution to the day's fog, already in course of formation, with every grate in London panting to take shares. Rosalind did not wait to see the black column of smoke start for its chimney-pot, but went straight to the patient's bedside.

"Is that Rosey? I can't see very well. Come and sit beside me. I want you." He was speaking more easily than before, so his hearer thought. Could it be a change for the better? She put her finger on the pulse, but it was hard to find. The fever had left him for the time being, but its work was done. It was wonderful, though, that he should have so much life in him for speech.

"What is it, Major dear? . . . Let's get the pillow right. . . . There, that's better! Yes, dear; what is it?"

"I've got my marching orders, Rosey. I shall be all right. Shan't be sorry. . . . when it's over. . . . Rosey girl, I want you to do something for me. . . . Is my watch there, with the keys?"

"Yes, dear; the two little keys."

"The little one opens my desk. . . with the brass corners. . . . Yes, that one. . . . Open the top flap, and look in the little left-hand drawer. Got it?"

"Yes; you want the letters out? There's only one packet."

"That's the lot. Read what's written on them."

"Only 'Emily, 1837.'"

"Quite right! That was your aunt, you know—your father's sister. Don't cry, darling. Nothing to cry about! I'm only an old chap. There, there!" Rosalind sat down again by the bed, keeping the packet of letters in her hand. Presently the old man, who had closed his eyes as though dozing, opened them and said: "Have you put them on the fire?"

"No. Was I to?"

"That was what I meant. I thought I said so. . . . Yes; pop 'em on." Rosalind went to the fireside and stood hesitating, till the old man repeated his last words; then threw the love-letters of sixty years ago in a good hot place in the burning coal. A flare, and they were white ash trying to escape from a valley of burning rocks; then even that was free to rise. Maybe the only one who ever read them would be soon—would be a mere attenuated ash, at least, as far as what lay on that bed went, so pale and evanescent even now.

"A fool of a boy, Rosey dear," said the old voice, as she took her place by the bed again. "Just a fool of a boy, to keep them all those years. And *she* married to another fellow, and a great-grandmother. Ah, well! . . . don't you cry about it, Rosey. . . . All done now!" She may have heard him wrong, for his voice went to a whisper. She wondered at the way the cough was sparing him.

Then she thought he was falling asleep again; but presently he spoke. "I shall do very well now. . . . Nothing but a little rest. . . that's all I want now. Only there's something I wanted to say about. . . about. . . ."

"About Sally?" Rosalind guessed quickly, and certainly.

"Ah . . . about the baby. *Your* baby, Rosey. . . . That man that was her father . . . he's on my mind. . . ."

"Oh me, forget him, dear—forget him! Leave him to God!" Rosalind repeated a phrase used twenty years ago by herself in answer to the old soldier's first uncontrollable outburst of anger against the man who had made her his victim. His voice rose again above a whisper as he answered:

"I heard you say so, dear child . . . then . . . that time. You were right, and I was wrong. But what I've said—many a time, God forgive me!—that I prayed he was in hell. I would be glad now to think I had not said it."

"Don't think of it. Oh, my dear, don't think of it! You never meant it . . . ."

"Ah, but I did, though; and would again, mind you, Rosey! Only—not now! Better let him go, for Sallykin's sake. . . . The child's the puzzle of it. . . ."

Rosalind thought she saw what he was trying to say, and herself tried to supplement it. "You mean, why isn't Sally like him?"

"Ah, to be sure! Like father like son, they say. His son's a chip of the old block. But then—he's his mother's son, too. Two such!—and then see what comes of 'em. Sallykin's your daughter . . . Rosey's daughter. Sallykin. . . ." He seemed to be drowsing off from mere weakness; but he had something to say, and his mind made for speech and found it:

"Yes, Rosey; it's the end of the story. Soon off—I shall be! Not very long now. Wasn't it foggy?"

"Yes, dear; it was. But it's clear now. It's snowing."

"Then you could send for Jack Roper. Old Jack! He can tell me something I want to know . . . I know he can. . . ."

"But it's the middle of the night, dear. We can't send for him now. Sally shall go for him again when she comes in the morning. What is it you want to know?"

"What became of poor Algernon Palliser. . . . I know Old Jack knows. . . . Something he heard. . . . I forget things . . . my head's not good. Ah, Rosey darling! if I'd been there in the first of it . . . I could have got speech of him. I might have . . . might have. . . ."

As the old man's mind wandered back to the terrible time it dragged his hearer's with it. Rosalind tried to bear it by thinking of what Sally was like in those days, crumpled, violent, vociferous, altogether *intransigente*. But it was only a moment's



salve to a reeling of the reason she knew must come if this went on. If he slept it might be averted. She thought he was dropping off, but he roused himself again to say : " What became of poor Palliser—your husband ?"

Then Rosalind, whose head was swimming, let the fact slip from her that the dying man had never seen or known her husband in the old days ; only he had always spoken of him as one to be pitied, not blamed, even as she herself thought of him. Incautiously she now said, " Poor Gerry !" forgetting that Colonel Lund had never known him by that name, or so slightly that it did not connect itself. Yet his mind was marvellously clear, too ; for he immediately replied : " I did not mean Fenwick. I meant your first husband. Poor boy ! poor fellow ! What became of him ?"

" *His* name was Algernon, too," was all the answer she could think of. It was a sort of forlorn hope in nettle-grasping. Then she saw it had little meaning in it for her listener. His voice went on, almost whispering :

" Many a time I've thought . . . if we could have found the poor boy . . . and shown him Sally . . . he might have . . . might have . . ."

Rosalind could bear it no longer. Whoever reads this story carelessly may see little excuse for her that she should lose her head at the bedside of a dying man. It was really no matter for surprise that she should do so. Consider the perpetual tension of her life, the broken insufficient sleep of the last two days, the shock of " Old Jack's " sudden death a few hours since ! Small blame to her, to our thinking, if she did give way ! To some it may even seem, as to us, that the course she took was best in the end. And, indeed, her self-control stood by her to the last ; it was a retreat in perfect order, not a flight. Nor did she, perhaps, fully measure how near her old friend was to his end, or release—a better name, perhaps.

" Major dear, I have something I must tell you." The old eyelids opened, and his eyes turned to her, though he remained motionless—quite as one who caught the appeal in the tension of her voice and guessed its meaning.

" Rosey darling—yes ; tell me now." His voice tried to rise above a whisper ; an effort seemed to be in it to say : " Don't keep anything back on my account."

" So I will, dear. Shut your eyes and lie quiet and listen. I want to tell you that I know that my first husband is not

dead. . . . Yes, dear ; don't try to speak. You'll see when I tell you. . . . Algernon Palliser is not dead, though we thought he must be. He went away from Lahore after the proceedings, and he did go to Australia, no doubt, as we heard at the time ; but after that he went to America, and was there till two years ago . . . and then he came to England." The old man tried to speak, but this time his voice failed, and Rosalind thought it best to go straight on. "He came to England, dear, and met with a bad accident, and lost his memory. . . ."

"*What !*" The word came so suddenly and clearly that it gave her new courage to go on. She *must* tell it all now, and she felt sure he was hearing and understanding all she said.

"Yes, dear ; it's all true. Let me tell it all. He lost his memory completely, so that he did not know his own name. . . ."

"My God !"

"Did not know his own name, dear—did not know his own name—did not know the face of the wife he lost twenty years ago—all, all a blank ! . . . Yes, yes ; it was he himself, and I took him and kept him, and I have him now . . . and oh, my dear, my dear, he does not know it—knows *nothing* ! He does not know who I am, nor who he was, nor that Sally is the baby ; but he loves her dearly, as he never could have loved her if . . . if. . . ."

She could say no more. The torrent of tears that was the first actual relief to the weight upon her heart of two years of secrecy grew and grew till speech was overwhelmed. But she knew that her story, however scantily told, had reached her listener's mind, though she could not have said precisely at what moment he came to know it. The tone of his exclamation, "My God !" perhaps had made her take his knowledge for granted. Of one thing, however, she felt certain—that details were needless, would add nothing to the main fact, which she was quite convinced her old friend had grasped with a mind still capable of holding it, although it might be in death. Even so, one tells a child the outcome only of what one tells in full to older ears. Then quick on the heels of the relief of sharing her burden with another followed the thought of how soon the sympathy she had gained must be lost, buried—so runs the code of current speech—in her old friend's grave. All her heart poured out in tears on the hand that could still close fitfully upon her own as she knelt by the bed on which he would so soon lie dying.



Presently his voice came again—a faint whisper she could just catch: “Tell it me again, Rosey . . . what you told me just now . . . just now.” And she felt his cold hand close on hers as he spoke. Then she repeated what she had said before, adding only: “But he may never come to know his own story, and Sally must not know it.” The old whisper came back, and she caught the words: “Then it is true! My God!”

She remained kneeling motionless beside him. His breath, weak and intermittent, but seeming more free than when she left him four hours since, was less audible than the heavy sleep of the overtaxed nurse in the next room, heard through the unclosed door. The familiar early noises of the street, the life outside that cares so little for the death within, the daily bread and daily milk that wake us too soon in the morning, the cynical interchanges of cheerful early risers about the comfort of the weather—all grew and gathered towards the coming day. But the old Colonel heard none of them. What thought he still had could say to him that this was good and that was good, hard though it might be to hold it in mind. But one bright golden thread ran clear through all the tangled skeins—he would leave Rosey happy at last, for all the bitterness her cup of life had held before.

The nurse had slept profoundly, but she was one of those fortunate people who can do so at will, and then wake up at an appointed time, as many great soldiers have been able to do. As the clock struck eight she sat up in the chair she had been sleeping in and listened a moment. No sound came from the next room. She rose and pushed the door open cautiously and looked in. Mrs. Fenwick was still kneeling by the bed, her face hidden, still holding the old man’s hand. The nurse thought surely the still white face she saw in the intermittent gleams of a lamp-flame flickering out was the face of a dead man. Need she rouse or disturb the watcher by his side? Not yet, certainly. She pulled the door very gently back, not closing it.

A sound came of footsteps on the stairs—footsteps without voices. It was Fenwick and Sally, who had passed through the street door, open for a negotiation for removal of the snow—for the last two hours had made a white world outside. Sally was a stairflight in the rear. She had paused for a word with the boy Chancellorship, who was a candidate for snow-removal. He seemed relieved by the snow. It was a tidy lot better



morning than last night, missis. He had breakfasted—yes—off of corfy, and paid for it, and buttered 'arf slices and no stintin', for twopence. Sally had a fellow-feeling for this boy's optimism. But he had something on his mind, for when Sally asked him if Major Roper had got home safe last night, his cheerfulness clouded over, and he said first, "Couldn't say, missis"; and then, "He's been got home, you may place your dependence on that"; adding, inexplicably to Sally, "He won't care about this weather; it won't be no odds!" She couldn't wait to find out his meaning, but told him he might go on clearing away the snow, and when Mrs. Kindred came he was to say Miss Rosalind Nightingale told him he might. She said she would be answerable, and then ran to catch up Fenwick.

The nurse came out to meet them on the landing, and in answer to Fenwick's half-enquiry or look of enquiry—Sally did not gather which—said: "Yes—at least, I think so—just now." Sally made up her mind it was death. But it was not, quite; for as the nurse, preceding them, pushed the door of the sick-room gently open, the voice of the man she believed dead came out almost strong and clear in the silence: "Evil has turned to good. God be praised!"

But they were the last words Colonel Lund spoke. He died so quietly that the exact moment of dissolution was not distinguishable. Fenwick and Sally found Rosalind so overstrained with grief and watching that they asked for no explanation of the words. Indeed, they may not have ascribed any special meaning to them.

## CHAPTER XXV

It may make this story easier to read at this point if we tell our reader that this twenty-fifth chapter contains little of vital import—is, in fact, only a passing reference to one or two by-incidents that came about in the half-year that followed. He cannot complain that they are superfluous if we give him fair warning of their triviality, and enable him to skip them without remorse. But they register, to our thinking, what little progress events made in six very nice months—a period Time may be said to have skipped. And whoso will may follow his example, and lose but little in the doing of it.

Very nice months they were—only one cloud worth mention in the blue ; only one phrase in a minor key. The old familiar figure of “the Major”—intermittent, certainly, but none the less invariable ; making the house his own, or letting it appropriate him, hard to say which—was no longer to be seen ; but the old sword had been hung in a place of honour near a portrait of Paul Nightingale, Mrs. Fenwick’s stepfather—its old owner’s school-friend of seventy years ago. At her death it was to be offered to the school ; no surviving relative was named in the will, if any existed. Everything was left unconditionally “to my dear daughter by adoption, Rosalind Nightingale.”

Some redistributions of furniture were involved in the importation of the movables from the two rooms in Ball Street. The black cabinet, or cellaret, with the eagle-talons, found a place in the dining-room in the basement into which Fenwick—only it seems so odd to go back to it now—was brought on the afternoon of his electrocution. Sally always thought of this cabinet as “Major Roper’s cabinet,” because she got the whisky from it for him before he went off in the fog. If only she had made him drunk that evening ! Who knows, but it might have enabled him to fight against that terrible heart-failure that was not the result of atmospheric conditions. She never

looked at this cabinet but the thought passed through her mind.

Her mother certainly told her nothing at this time about her last conversation with the Colonel, or almost nothing. Certainly she mentioned more than once what she thought a curious circumstance—that the invalid, who was utterly ignorant of Old Jack's death, had persisted so strongly that he was present in the room when he must have been dead some hours. Every one of us has his little bit of Psychical Research, which he demands respect for from others, whose own cherished private instances he dismisses without investigation. This example became Mrs. Fenwick's, who, to be just, had not set herself up with one previously, in spite of the temptation the Anglo-Indian is always under to espouse Mahatmas and buried Faquirs and the like. There seemed a good prospect that it would become an article of faith with her; her first verdict—that it was an hallucination—having been undermined by a certain contradictiousness, produced in her by an undeserved discredit poured on it by pretenders to a superior ghost-insight; who, after all, tried to utilise it afterwards as a peg to hang their own particular ghosts on. Which wasn't researching fair.

Sally was no better than the rest of them; if anything, she was a little worse. And Rosalind was far from sure that her husband wouldn't have been much more reasonable if he hadn't had Sally there to encourage him. As it was, the league became, *pro hac vice*, a league of Incredulity, a syndicate of Materialists. Rosalind got no quarter for the half-belief she had in what the old Colonel had said on his death-bed. Her report of his evident earnestness and the self-possession of his voice carried no weight; failing powers, delirium, effects of opiates, and ten degrees above normal, had it all their own way. Besides, her superstition was weak-kneed. It only went the length of suggesting that it really was very curious when you came to think of it, and she couldn't make it out.

That the incident received such very superficial recognition must be accounted for by the fact that Krakatoa Villa was not a villa of the speculative-thinker class. We have known such villas elsewhere, but we are bound to say we have known none where speculative thought has tackled the troublesome questions of death-bed appearances, haunted houses, *et id genus omne*, with the result of coming to any but very speculative conclusions. The male head of this household may have felt that he



himself, as a problem for the Psychical Researcher, was ill-fitted to discuss the subject. He certainly shied off expressing any decided opinions.

"What do you really think about ghosts?" said his wife to him one day, when Sally wasn't there to come in with her chaff.

"Ghosts belong in titled families. Middle-class ghosts are a poor lot. Those in the army and navy cut the best figure, on the whole—Junior United Service ghosts. . . ."

"Gerry, be serious, or I'll have a divorce!" This was a powerful grip on a stinging-nettle. Rosalind felt braced by the effort. "Did you ever see a ghost, old man?"

"Not in the present era, sweetheart. I can't say about B.C." He used to speak of his life in this way, but his wife always felt sorry when he alluded to it. It seldom happened. "No, I have never seen one to my knowledge. I've been seen as a ghost, though, which is very unpleasant, I assure you."

Rosalind's mind went back to the fat Baron at Sonnenberg. She supposed this to be another case of the same sort. "When was that?" she said.

"Monday. I took a hansom from Cornhill to our bonded warehouse. It's under a mile, and I asked the driver to change half-a-crown; I hadn't a shilling. He got out a handful of silver, and when he had picked out the two shillings and sixpence he looked at me for the first time, and started and stared as if I was a ghost in good earnest."

"Oh, Gerry, he must have seen you before—before it happened!" Remember that this was, in the spirit of it, a fib, seeing that the tone of voice was that of welcome to a possible revelation. To our thinking, the more honour to her who spoke it, considering the motives. Gerry continued:

"So I thought at first. But listen to what followed. As soon as his surprise, whatever caused it, had toned down to mere recognition point, he spoke with equanimity. 'I've driven you afore now, mister,' said he. 'You won't call me to mind. Parties don't, not when fares; when drivers, quite otherwise. I'm by way of taking notice myself. You'll excuse *me*?' Then he said, 'War-r-r-p!' to the horse, who was trying to eat himself and dig the road up. When they were friends again, I asked, Where had he seen me? Might I happen to call to mind Livermore's Rents, and that turn-up?—that was his reply. I said I mightn't; or didn't, at any rate. I had never been near Livermore's Rents, nor anyone else's rents, that I could recall the

name of. 'Try again, guv'nor,' said he. 'You'll recall if you try hard enough. *He* recollects it, *I'll* go bail. My Goard! you *did* let him have it!' Was it a fight? I asked. Well, do you know, darling, that cabby addressed me seriously; took me to task for want of candour. 'That ain't worthy of a guv'nor like you,' he said. 'Why make any concealments? Why not treat me open?' I gave him my most solemn honour that I was utterly at a loss to guess what he was talking about, on which he put me through a sort of retrospective catechism, broken by reminders to the horse. 'You don't rec'lect goin' easy over the bridge for to see the shipping? Nor yet the little narrer court right-hand side of the road, with an iron post under an arch and parties hollerin' murder at the far end? Nor yet the way you held him in hand and played him? Nor yet what you sampled him out at the finish? My Goard!' He slapped the top of the cab in a sort of ecstasy. 'Never saw a neater thing in my life. No unnecessary violence, no agitation! And him carried off the ground as good as dead! Ah! I made inquiry after, and that was *so*.' I then said it must have been some one else very like me, and held out my half-crown. He slipped back his change into his own pocket, and when he had buttoned it over ostentatiously addressed me again with what seemed a last appeal. 'I take it, guv'nor,' said he, 'you may have such a powerful list of fighting fixtures in the week that you don't easy recollect one out from the other. But *now, do, you, mean* to say your memory don't serve you in this?—I drove you over to Bishopsgate, 'cross London Bridge. Very well! Then you bought a hat—white Panama—and took change, seein' your own was lost. And you was going to pay me, and I drove off, refusin' to accept a farden under the circumstances. Don't you rec'lect that?' I said I didn't. 'Well, I *did*,' said he. 'And, with your leave, I'll do the same thing now. I'll drive you most anywhere you'd like to name in reason, but I won't take a farden.' And, do you know, he was off before my surprise allowed me to say a word."

"Now, Gerry, was it that made you so glum on Monday when you came back? I recollect quite well. So would Sally."

"Oh no; it was uncomfortable at first, but I soon forgot all about it. I recollect what it was put me in the dumps quite well. It was a long time after the cabby."

"What was it?"

"Well, it was as I walked to the station. I went a little way



round, and passed through an anonymous sort of a churchyard. I saw a box in a wall with 'contributions' on it, and remembering that I really had no right to the cabby's shilling or eighteenpence, I dropped a florin in. And then, Rosey dear, I had the most horrible recurrence I've had for a long time—something about the same place and the same box, and someone else putting three shillings in it. And it was all mixed up with a bottle of champagne and a bank. I can't explain why these things are so painful, but they are. *You know, Rosey !*"

"I know, dear." His wife's knowledge seemed to make her quite silent and absent. She may have seen that the recovery of this cabman would supply a clue to her husband's story. Had he taken the number of the cab? No, he hadn't. Very stupid of him! But he had no pencil, or he could have written it on his shirt-sleeve. He couldn't trust his memory. Rosalind didn't feel very sorry the clue was lost. As for him, did he, we wonder, really exert himself to remember the cab's number?

But when the story was told afterwards to Sally, the moment the Panama hat came on the tapis, she struck in with, "Jeremiah! you know quite well you had a Panama hat on the day you were electrocuted. And, what's more, it was brand new! And, what's more, it's outside in the hall!"

It was brought in, and produced a spurious sense of being detectives on the way to a discovery. But nothing came of it.

All through the discussion of this odd cab-incident the fact that Fenwick "would have written down the cab-driver's number on his shirt-sleeve," was on the watch for a recollection by one of the three that a something had been found written on the shirt-cuff Fenwick was electrocuted in. The ill-starred shrewdness of Scotland Yard, by detecting a mere date in that something, had quite thrown it out of gear as an item of evidence. By the way, did no one ever ask why should any man, being of sound mind, write the current date on his shirt-sleeve? It really is a thing that can look after its own interests for twenty-four hours. The fact is that, no sooner do coincidences come into court, than sane investigation flies out at the skylight.

There was much discussion of this incident, you may be sure; but that is all we need to know about it.

Our other chance gleanings of the half year are in quite another part of the field. They relate to Sally and Dr. Vereker's relation to one another. If this relation had anything lover-like in



it, they certainly were not taking Europe into their confidence on the subject. Whether their attitude was a spontaneous expression of respectful indifference, or a *parti-pris* to mislead and hoodwink her, of course Europe couldn't tell. All that that continent, or the subdivision of it known as Shepherd's Bush, could see was a parade of callousness and studied civility on the part of both. The only circumstance that impaired its integrity or made the bystander doubt the good faith of its performers was the fact that one of them was a girl, and an attractive one—so attractive that elderly ladies jumped meanly at the supposed privileges of their age and sex, and kissed her a great deal more than was at all fair or honourable.

The ostentatious exclusion of Cupid from the relationship of these two demanded a certain mechanism. Every meeting had to be accounted for, or there was no knowing what match-making busybodies wouldn't say ; or, rather, what they would say would be easily guessable by the lowest human insight. Not that either of them ever mentioned precaution to the other ; all its advantages would have vanished with open acknowledgment of its necessity. These arrangements were instinctive on the part of both, and each credited the other with a mole-like blindness to their existence.

For instance, each was graciously pleased to believe—or, at least, to believe that the other believed—in a certain institution that called for a vast amount of checking of totals, comparisons of counterfoils, inspection of certificates, verification of data—everything, in short, of which an institute is capable that could make incessant correspondence necessary and frequent personal interviews advisable. It could boast of Heaven knows how many titled Patrons and Patronesses, Committees and Sub-committees, Referees and Auditors. No doubt the mere mention of such an institution was enough to render gossip speechless about any single lady and gentleman whom it accidentally made known one to another. Its firm of Solicitors alone, with a line all to itself in its prospectuses, was enough to put a host of Loves to flight.

On which account Anne, at Krakatoa Villa, when she announced, “A person for you, Miss Sally,” was able to add, “from Dr. Vereker, I think, miss,” without the faintest shade of humorous reserve, as of one who sees, and does not need to be told.

And when Sally had interviewed a hopeless and lopsided female,

who appeared to be precariously held together by pins, and to have an almost superhuman power of evading practical issues, she (fortified by this institution) was able to return to the drawing-room and say, without a particle of shame, that she supposed she should have to go and see Old Prosy about Mrs. Shoosmith to-morrow afternoon. And when she called at the doctor's at teatime—because that didn't take him from his patients, as he made a point of his tea, because of his mother, if it was only ten minutes—both he and she believed religiously in Mrs. Shoosmith, and Dr. Vereker filled out her form (we believe we have the phrase right) with the most business-like gravity at the little table where he wrote his letters.

Mrs. Shoosmith's form called for filling out in more senses than one. The doctor's mother's form would not have borne anything further in that direction; except, indeed, she had been provided with hooks to go over her chair back, and keep her from rolling along the floor, as a sphere might if asked to sit down.

A suggestion of the exceptional character of all visits from Sally to Dr. Vereker, and *vice versa*, was fostered by the domestics at his house as well as at Krakatoa Villa. The maid Craddock, who responded to Sally's knock on this Shoosmith occasion, threw doubt on the possibility of the doctor ever being visible again, and kept the door mentally on the jar while she spoke through a moral gap an inch wide. Of course, that is only our nonsense. Sally was really in the house when Craddock heroically, as a forlorn hope in a lost cause, offered to "go and see"; and going, said, "Miss Nightingale; and is Dr. Vereker expected in to tea?" without varnish of style, or redundancy of wording. But Sally lent herself to this insincere performance, and remained in the hall until she was called on to decide whether she would mind coming in and waiting, and Dr. Vereker would perhaps be back in a few minutes. All this was part of the system of insincerity we have hinted at.

So was the tenor of Sally's remarks, while she waited the few minutes, to the effect that it was a burning shame that she should take up Mrs. Vereker's time, a crying scandal that she should interrupt her knitting, and a matter of penitential reflection that she hadn't written instead of coming, which would have done just as well. To which Mrs. Vereker, with a certain parade of pretended insincerity (to make the real article underneath seem *bona fides*), replied with mock-incredible statements about the



pleasure she always had in seeing Sally, and the rare good fortune which had prompted a visit at this time, when, in addition to being unable to knit, owing to her eyes, she had been absorbed in longing for news of a current event that Sally was sure to know about. She particularised it.

"Oh, it isn't *true*, Mrs. Vereker! You don't mean to say you believed *that* nonsense? The idea! Tishy—just fancy!" Goody Vereker (the name Sally thought of her by) couldn't shake her head, the fulness at the neck forbade it; but she moved it cosily from side to side continuously, much as a practicable image of Buddha might have done.

"My child, I've quite given up believing and disbelieving things. I wait to be told, and then I ask if it's true. Now you've told me. It isn't true, and that settles the matter."

"But whoever could tell you such *nonsense*, Mrs. Vereker?"

"A little bird, my dear." The image of Buddha left off the movement of incredulity, and began a very gentle, slow nod. "A little bird tells me these things—all sorts of things. But now I *know* this one's untrue I should never *dream* of believing it. Not for one moment."

Sally felt inclined to pinch, bite, or otherwise maltreat the speaker, so very worthless did her offer of optional disbelief seem, and, indeed, so very offensive. But her inclination only went the length of wondering how she could get at a vulnerable point through so much fat.

"Tishy quarrels with her mother, I *know*," said she. "But as to her doing anything like *that*! Besides, she never told me. Besides, I should have been asked to the wedding. Besides, etcetera."

For, you see, what this elderly lady had asked the truth about was, had or had not Lætitia Wilson and Julius Bradshaw been privately married six months ago? Probably, during æons and epochs of knitting, she had dreamed that some one had told her this. Or, even more probably, she had invented it on the spot, to see what change she could get out of Sally. She knew that Sally, prudently exasperated, would give tongue; whereas conciliatory, cosy inquisition—the right way to approach the elderly gossip—would only make her reticent. Now it was only necessary to knit, and Sally would be sure to develop the subject. The line she appeared to take was that it was a horrible shame of people to say such things, in view of the fact that it was only yesterday that Tishy had quite settled that rash matrimony in



defiance of her parents would not only be inexcusable but wrong. Sally laid a fiery emphasis on the only-ness of yesterday, and seemed to imply that, had it been a week ago, there would have been much more plausibility in the story of this secret nuptial of six months back.

"Besides," she went on, accumulating items of refutation, "Julius has only his salary, and Tishy has nothing—though, of course, she could teach. Besides, Julius has his mother and sister, and they have only a hundred and fifty a year. It does as long as they all live together. But it wouldn't do if Julius married." On which the old Goody (Sally told her mother after) embarked on a long analysis of how joint housekeeping could be managed if Tishy would consent to be absorbed into the Bradshaw household. She made rather a grievance of it that Sally could not supply data of the sleeping accommodation at Georgiana Terrace, Bayswater. If she had known that, she could have got them all billeted on different rooms. As it was, she had to be content to enlarge on the many economies the family could achieve if they consented to be guided by a person of experience—*e.g.*, herself.

"Of course, dinner would have to be late," she said, "because of Mr. Bradshaw not getting home till nearly eight. They would have to make it supper. And it might be cold; it's a great saving, and makes it so easy where there's one servant." Sally shuddered with horror at this implied British household. Poor Tishy!

"But they're *not going* to marry till they see their way," she exclaimed in despair. She felt that Tishy and Julius were being involved, entangled, immeshed by an old matrimonial octopus in gilt-rimmed spectacles—like Professor Wilson's—who could knit tranquilly all the while, while she herself could do nothing to save them. "It might be cold!!" Every evening, perhaps—who knows?

"Very proper, my dear." Thus the Octopus. "I felt sure such a nice, sensible girl as Miss Wilson never would. That is Conrad." It really was a sound of a latch-key, but speech is no mere slave to fact.

"And I was really quite glad when Dr. Prosy came in—the way the Goody was going on about Tishy!" So Sally said to her mother when she had completed her report of the portion of this visit she chose to tell about. On which her mother said, "What a dear little humbug you are, kitten," and she replied, as we

have heard her reply before, "We-e-ell, there's nothing in that!" and posed as one who has been misrepresented. But her mother stuck to her point, which was that Sally knew she was quite glad when Dr. Vereker came in, Tishy or no.

Whatever the reason was that Sally was quite glad at the appearance of Dr. Prosy, there could be no doubt about the fact. Her laugh reached the cook in the kitchen, who denounced Craddock the parlourmaid for not telling her it was Miss Nightingale, when it might have been a visitor, seeing no noise come of it. Cook remarked she knew how it would be—there was the doctor picking up like—and hadn't she told Craddock so? But Craddock said no!

"Mrs. Shoosmith again—the everlasting Mrs. Shoosmith!" exclaimed the doctor. It was very unfeeling of them to laugh so over this unhappy woman, who was the survivor of two husbands and the proprietor of one, and the mother of seven daughters and five sons, each of whom was a typical "case," and all of whom sought admission to Institutes on their merits. The lives of the whole family were passed in applications for testimonials and certificates, alike bearing witness to their chronic qualifications for it. Sally was mysteriously hard-hearted about them, while fully admitting their claims on the public.

"That's right, Dr. Conrad"—Sally had inaugurated this name for herself—"Honorina Purvis Shoosmith. Mind you put in the Purvis right. Now write down lots of diseases for her to have." Sally is leaning over the doctor's chair to see him write as she says this. There is something in the atmosphere of the situation that seems to clash with the actual business in hand. The doctor endeavours, not seriously enough, perhaps, to infuse a flavour of responsibility.

"My professional dignity, Miss Nightingale, will not permit of the scheme of diagnosis you indicate. If any disorders entirely without symptoms were known to exist, I should be delighted to ascribe the whole of them to Mrs. Shoosmith. . . ."

"Don't be prosy, Dr. Conrad. Fire away! You told me lots—you know you did! Rheumatic arthritis—gout—pyæmia . . ."

"Come, I say, Miss Sally, draw it mild. I never said pyæmia. Anæmia, perhaps. . . ."

"Very well, Anne, then! We can let it go at that. Fire away!" The doctor looks round his own corner at the rows



of pearls and the laugh that frames them, the merry eyebrows and the scintillating eyes they accentuate. A perilous intoxication, not to be too freely indulged in by a serious professional man at any time—in business hours certainly not. But if the doctor were quite in earnest over a sort of Spartan declaration of policy his heart feels the prudence of, would that responsive twinkle flutter in his face behind its mock gravity? He is all but head over ears in love with Sally—so why pretend? Really, we don't know—and that's the truth.

"Wouldn't it be a good way to consider what it is that is really the matter, and make out the statement accordingly?" He goes on looking at Sally, scratches himself under the chin with his pen, and waits for an answer.

"Good, sensible, general practitioner! See how practical he is! Now, I should never have thought of that!"

"Well, what shall we put her down as? Chronic arthritis—spinal curvature—tuberculosis of the cervical vertebræ?"

"Those all sound very nice. But I don't think it matters which you choose. If she hasn't got it now, she'll develope it if I describe it. When I told her mother couldn't get rid of her neuritis, she immediately asked to know the symptoms, and forthwith claimed them as her own. 'Well, there now, and to think what I was just a-sayin' to Shoosmith, this very morning! Just in the crick of the thumb-joint, you can't 'ardly abear yourself!' And then she told how she said to Shoosmith frequent, where was the use of his getting impatient, and exclaimin' the worst expressions? Because his language went beyond a quart, and no reasonable excuse."

"Mr. Shoosmith doesn't seem a very promising sort? He's a tailor, isn't he?"

"No; he's a messenger. He runs on errands and does odd jobs. But he can't run—I've seen him!—he can only shamble. And his voice is hoarse and inaudible. And he has a drawback—two drawbacks, in fact. He is no sooner giv' coppers on a job than he drinks them."

"What's the other?"

"His susceptibility to intoxicants. His 'ead is that weak that 'most anythink upsets him. So you see."

"Poor chap! He's handicapped in the race of life. As for his wife, when I saw her she was suffering with acute rheumatism and bad feeding—and, I may add, defective reasoning power. However. . . ." The doctor fills in blanks, adds a signature,



says "There we are !" and Mrs. Shoosmith is disposed of as an applicant to the institution, and will no doubt reap some benefits we need not know the particulars of. But she remains as a subject for the student of human life—also, tea comes—also, which is interesting, Sally proceeds to make it.

Now, if the reserves this young lady had made about this visit, if her pretence that it was a necessity arising from a charitable organization, if the colour that was given to that pretence by her interview with the servant Craddock—if any of these things had been more or less than the grossest hypocrisy, would it, we ask you, have been accepted as a matter of course that she should pull off her gloves and sit down to make tea with a mature knowledge of how to get the little lynch-pin out of the spirit-lamp, and of how many spoonfuls? No; the fact is, Sally was a more frequent visitor to the image of Buddha than she chose to admit; and as for the doctor, he seized every legitimate opportunity of 'cello practice at Krakatoa Villa. But G.P.'s cannot call their time their own.

"The funny part of Mrs. Shoosmith," said Sally, when the pot was full up and the lid shut, "is that the moment she is brought into contact with warm soapy water and scrubbing-brushes, she seems to renew her youth. She brings large pins out of her mouth and secures her apron. And then she scrubs. Now you may blow the methylated out and make yourself useful, Dr. Conrad."

"Does she put back the pins when she's done scrubbing?" the doctor asks, when he has made himself useful.

"She puts them back against another time, so I have understood. I suppose they live in her mouth. That's yours with two lumps. That is your mother's—no, I won't pour it yet. She's asleep."

For the fact is that the Goody, anxious to invest herself with an appearance of forbearance towards the frivolities of youth, readiness to forgo (from amiability) any share in the conversation, insight into the *rappports* of others (especially male and female *rappports*), and general superiority to human weakness, had endeavoured to express all these things by laying down her knitting, folding her hands on her circumference, and looking as if she knew and could speak if she chose. But if you do this, even the maintenance of an attentive hypodermic smile is not enough to keep you awake—and off you go! The Goody did, and the smile died slowly off into a snore. Never mind! She

was in want of rest, so she said. It was curious, too, for she seldom got anything else.

It would have been unfeeling to wake her, so Dr. Vereker went and sat a good deal nearer Sally, not to make more noise than was necessary. This reacted, an outsider might have inferred, on the subject-matter of the conversation, making it more serious in tone. And as Sally put the little Turk's cap over the pot to keep it warm, and the doctor knew perfectly well that the blacker the tea was the better his mother liked it, this lasted until that lady woke up with a start a long time after, and said she must have been asleep. Then, as Cook was aware in the kitchen, some more noise came of it, and Sally carried off Mrs. Shoosmith's certificate.

"You know, Dr. Conrad, it makes you look like a real medical man," she said at the gate, referring to the detention of the doctor's pill-box, which awaited him, and he replied that it didn't matter. King, the driver, looked as if he thought it *did*, and appeared morose. Is it because coachmen always keep their appointments with society and society never keeps its appointments with coachmen that a settled melancholy seems to brood over them, and their souls seem cankered with misanthropy?

The doctor had rather a rough time that evening. For among the patients he was going to try to see and get back to dinner (thus ran current speech of those concerned), there was a young man from the West Indies, who had come into something considerable. But he was afflicted with a disorder he called the "jumps," and the doctor's diagnosis, if correct, showed that the *vera causa* of this aptly-named disease was alcohol of sp. gr. something, to which the patient was in the habit of adding very few atoms of water indeed. The doctor was doing all he could to change the regimen, but only succeeded on making his patient weak and promise amendment. On this particular evening the latter quite unexpectedly went for the doctor's throat, shouting, "I see your plans!" and King had to be summoned from his box to help restrain him. So Dr. Vereker was tired when he got home late to dinner, and would have felt miserable, only he could always shut his eyes and think of Sally's hands that had come over his shoulder to discriminate points in Mrs. Shoosmith's magna-charta. They had come so near him that he could smell the fresh sweet dressing of the new kid gloves—six and a half, we believe.



But although he liked his Goody mother to talk to him about the girl who had christened her so, he was tired enough this evening to wish that her talk had flowed in a less pebbly channel. For she chose this opportunity to enlarge upon the duties of young married women towards their husbands' parents, their mothers especially. Her conclusion was a little unexpected:

"I have said nothing throughout, my dear. I should not dream of doing so. But if I had I trust I should have made it clearly understood how I regarded Miss Lætitia Wilson's conduct."

"But there wasn't any. Nobody contracted a private marriage."

"My dear Conrad! Have I said that anyone has done so? Have I used the expression 'private marriage'?"

"Why—no. I don't think you have. Not to-day, at least."

"When have I done so? Have I not, on the contrary, from the very beginning told you I should take the first opportunity of disbelieving so absurd and mischievous a story? And have I lost a moment? Was it not the first word I said to Sally Nightingale before you came in, and without a soul in the room to hear? I only ask for justice. But if my son misrepresents me, what can I expect from others?" At this point patient toleration only.

"But, mother dear, I don't *want* to misrepresent you. Only I'll be hanged if I see why Tishy Wilson is to be hauled over the coals!"

A suggestion of a proper spirit showed itself. "I am accustomed to your language, and will say nothing. But, my dear Conrad, for you are always my son, and will remain so, whatever your language may be, do you, my dear Conrad, do you really sanction the attitude of a young lady who refuses to marry—public and private don't come into the matter—because of a groundless antipathy? For it is admitted on all hands that Mrs. Julius Bradshaw is a person of rather superior class."

"She's Mrs. Bradshaw—not Mrs. Julius. But what makes you suppose Tishy Wilson objects to her?"

"My dear Conrad, you know as well as I do that is a mere prevarication. Why evade the point? But in my opinion you do wisely not to attempt any defence of Lætitia Wilson. It may be true that she has not laid herself open to misconstruction in this case, but the lack of good feeling is to all intents



and purposes the same as if she had ; and I must say, my dear Conrad, I am surprised that a professional man with your qualifications should undertake to justify her."

"But Miss Wilson hasn't *done* anything! What are you wiggling away at her for, mother dear?"

"Have I not expressly said that she has done nothing whatever? Of course she has not, and, I hope, never will. But it is easy for you, Conrad, to take refuge in a fact which I have been scrupulously careful to admit from the very beginning. And 'wiggling away!' What language!"

"Never mind the language, mother darling! Tell me what it's all about." Tired as he is, he gets up from the chair he has not been smoking in (because this is the drawing-room) to go round and kiss what is probably the fatty integument of a very selfish old woman, but which he believes to be that of an affectionate mother. "What's it all about?" he repeats.

"My dear Conrad! Is it not a little unfeeling to ask me what it is all about when you know?"

"I *don't* know, mother dear. I can do any amount of guessing, but I don't *know*."

"I think, my dear, if you will light my candle and ring for Craddock to shut up, that I had better go to bed." Which her son does, but perversely abstains from giving the old lady any assistance to saying what is in her mind to say.

But she did not intend to be baffled. For when he had piloted her to her state apartment, carrying her candle, under injunctions on no account to spill the grease, and a magazine of wraps and wools and unintelligible sundries, she contrived to invest an elucidation of her ideas with an appearance of benevolence by working in a readiness to sacrifice herself to her son's selfish longing for tobacco.

"Only just hear me to the end, my dear, and then you can get away to your pipe. What I did *not* say—for you interrupted me—did not relate so much to Miss Lætitia Wilson as to Sally Nightingale. She, I am sure, would never come between any man she married and his mother. I am making no reference to anyone whatever, although, however old I am, I have eyes in my head and can see. But I can read character, and that is my interpretation of Sally Nightingale's."

"Sally Nightingale and I are not going to make it up, if that's what you mean, mother. She wouldn't have me, for one thing——"

“My dear, I am not going to argue the point. It is nearly eleven, and unless I get to bed I shan’t sleep. Now go away to your pipe, and think of what I have said. And don’t slam your door and wake me when you come up.” She offered him a selection to kiss, shutting her eyes tight. And he gave place to Craddock, and went away to his unwholesome, smelly habit, as his mamma had more than once called it. His face was perplexed and uncomfortable; however, it got ease after a few puffs of pale returns and a welcome minute of memory of the bouquet of those sixes.

But his little happy oasis was a very small one. For a messenger came with a furious pull at the night-bell and a summons for the doctor. His delirium-tremens case had very nearly qualified its brain for a P.M.—at least, if there were any of it left—by getting at a pistol and taking a bad aim at it. The unhappy dipsomaniac was half-shot, and prompt medical attendance was necessary to prevent the something considerable being claimed by his heir-at-law.

Whether this came to pass or not does not concern us. This much is certain, that at the end of six months which this chapter represents, and which you have probably skipped, he was as much forgotten by the doctor as the pipe his patient’s suicidal escapade had interrupted, or the semi-vexation with his mother he was using it as an anodyne for.

## CHAPTER XXVI

TOWARDS the end of the July that very quickly followed Rosalind noticed an intensification of what might be called the Ladbroke Grove Road Row Chronicle—a record transmitted by Sally to her real and adopted parent in the instalments in which she received it from Tishy.

This record on one occasion depicted a battle-royal at breakfast, “over the marmalade,” Sally said. She added that the Dragon might just as well have let the Professor alone. “He was reading,” she said, “‘The Classification of Roots in Pre-historic Dialects,’ because I saw the back; and Tacitus was on the butter. But the Dragon likes the grease to spoil the bindings, and she knows it.”

A vision of priceless Groliers soaking passed through Rosalind’s mind. “Wasn’t that what this row was about, then?” she asked.

“I don’t think so,” said Sally, who had gone home to breakfast with Tishy after an early swim. “It’s difficult to say what it was about. Really, the Professor had hardly said *anything at all*, and the Dragon said she thought he was forgetting the servants. Fossett wasn’t even in the room. And then the Dragon said, ‘Yes, shut it,’ to Athene. Fancy saying ‘Yes, shut it,’ in a confidential semitone! Really, I can’t see that it was so very wrong of Egerton, although he *is* a booby, to say there was no fun in having a row before breakfast. He didn’t mean them to think he meant them to hear.”

“But how did it get from the marmalade to Tishy’s haberdasher?” asked Fenwick.

“Can’t say, Jeremiah. It all came in a buzz, like a wopses, nest. And then Egerton said it was rows, rows, rows all day long, and he should hook it off and get a situation. It *is* rows, rows, rows, so it’s no use pretending it isn’t. But it always comes round to the haberdasher grievance in the end. This



time Tishy went to her father in the library, and confessed up about Kensington Gardens."

Both hearers said, "Oh, I see!" and then Sally transmitted the report of this interview. It had not been stormy, and may be looked at by the light of the Professor's last remark. "The upshot is, Tish, that you can marry Julius against your mother's consent right off, and never lose a penny of your aunt's legacy."

"Legacy is good, very excellent good," said Fenwick. "How much was it, Sarah?"

"Oh, I don't know. Lots—a good lot—a thousand pounds! The Dragon wanted to make out that it was conditional on her consent to Tishy's marriage. That was fibs. But what I don't see is that Gaffer Wilson ever said a word to Tishy about his own objections to her marrying Julius, if he has any!"

"Perhaps," Rosalind suggested, "she hasn't told you all he said." But to this Sally replied that Tishy had told her over and over and over again, only she said *over* so often that her adopted parent said for Heaven's sake stop, or he should write the word into his letters. However, the end of the last despatch was at hand, and he himself took up the conversation on signing it.

"Yours faithfully, Algernon Fenwick. That's the lot! I agree with the kitten."

"What about?"

"About if he has any. I believe he'd be glad if Miss Wilson took the bit in her teeth and bolted."

"You agree with Prosy?" As Sally says this, without a thought in a thoughtful face but what belongs to the subject, her mother is conscious that she herself is quite prepared to infer that Prosy already knows all about it. She has got into the habit of hearing that he knows about things.

"What does Vereker say?" Thus Fenwick.

"He'll be here in a minute, and you can ask him. That's him! I mean that's his ring."

"It's just like any other ring, chick." It is her mother who speaks. But Sally says: "Nonsense! as if I didn't know Prosy's ring!" And Dr. Vereker appears, quartette bound, for this was the weekly musical evening at Krakatoa Villa.

"Jeremiah wants to know whether you don't think Tishy's male parent would be jolly glad if she and Julius took the bit in their teeth and bolted?" "I shouldn't be the least surprised if they did," is the doctor's reply. But it does not strike Sally as rising to the height of her Draconic summary.

"You're not shining, Dr. Conrad," she says; "you're evading the point. What do *you* think Gaffer Bristles thinks, that's the point?" Dr. Conrad appears greatly exhilarated and refreshed by Sally, whose mother seems to share his feeling; but she enjoins caution, for all that.

"Do take care, kitten," she says. "They're on the stairs." But Sally considers "they" are miles off, and will take ages getting upstairs. "They've only just met at the door," is her explanatory comment, showing appreciation of one human weakness.

"Suppose we were to get it put in more official form!" Fenwick suggests. "Would Professor Sales Wilson be very much shocked if his daughter and Paganini made a runaway match of it?" The name Paganini has somehow leaked out of Cattley's counting-house, and become common property.

"I think, if you ask me," says Vereker, speaking to Fenwick, but never taking his eyes off Sally, on whom they feed, "that Professor Sales Wilson would be very much relieved."

"*That's* right!" says Sally, speaking as to a pupil who has profited. "Now you're being a good little General Practitioner." And then, the ages having elapsed with some alacrity, the door opens and the two subjects of discussion make their appearance.

The anomalous cousin did not come with them, having subsided. Mrs. Fenwick herself had taken the pianoforte parts lately. She had always been a fair pianist, and application had made her passable—a good make-shift, anyhow. So you may fill out the programme to your liking—it really doesn't matter what they played—and consider that this musical evening was one of their best that season. It was just as well it should be so, as it was their last till the autumn. Sally and her mother were going to the seaside all August and some of September, and Fenwick was coming with them for a week at first, and after that for short week-end spells. He had become a partner in the wine-business, and was not so much tied to the desk.

"Well, then, it's good-bye, I suppose?" The speaker is Rosalind herself, as the Stradivarius is being put to bed. But she hasn't the heart to let the verdict stand—at least, as far as the doctor is concerned. She softens it, adds a recommendation to mercy. "Unless you'll come down and pay us a visit. We'll put you up somewhere."

"I'm afraid it isn't possible," is the answer. But the doctor



can't get his eyes really off Sally. Even as a small boy might strain at the leash to get back to a source of cake against the grasp of an iron nurse, even so Dr. Conrad rebels against the grip of professional engagements, which is the name of his cold, remorseless tyrant. But Sally is harnessing up a coach-and-six to drive through human obligations. Her manner of addressing the doctor suggests previous talk on the subject.

"You *must* get the locum, and come. You know you can, and it's all nonsense about can't." What would be effrontery in another character makes Sally speak through and across the company. A secret confidence between herself and the doctor, that you are welcome to the full knowledge of, and be hanged to you! is what the manner of the two implies.

"I spoke to Neckitt about it, and he can't manage it," says the doctor in the same manner. But the first and second violin are waiting to take leave.

"We'll say good-night, then—or good-bye, if it's for six weeks." Tishy is perfectly unblushing about the *we*. She might be conveying Mr. Tishy away. They go, and get away from Dr. Vereker, by-the-bye. An awkward third isn't wanted.

"There's plenty more Neckitts where he comes from," pursues Sally, as the "other two"—for that is how Fenwick thinks of them—get themselves and their instruments out of the house. "So don't be nonsensical, Dr. Conrad. . . . Stop a moment. I *must* speak to Tishy." And Sally gives chase, and overtakes the other two just by the fire-alarm, where Fenwick came to a standstill. Do you remember? It certainly has been a record effort to "get away first." You know this experience yourself at parties? Sally speaks to Tishy in the glorious summer night, and the three talk earnestly together under innumerable constellations, and one gas-lamp that elbows the starry heavens out of the way—a self-asserting, cheeky gas-lamp.

The doctor organizes tactics rapidly. He can hear that Sally's step goes up the street, and then the voices at a distance. If he can say good-bye and rush away just as Sally does the same, why then they will meet outside, don't you see?

Rosalind and her husband seem to have wireless telegrams passing. For when Sally vanishes there is a ring as of instruction received in the tone of Fenwick's voice as he addresses the doctor:

"Couldn't you manage to get your mother to come too, Vereker? She must be terribly in want of a change."



"So I tell her ; but she's so difficult to move."

"Have a sedan-chair thing——"

"I don't mean that—not physically difficult. I mean she's got so anchored no one can persuade her to move. She hasn't been away for ages."

"Sally must go and persuade her." It is Rosalind who says this. "I'm sure Sally will manage it."

"She will if anyone can," says the doctor. "Of course, I could soon get a locum if there was a chance of mother." And then the conversation supports itself on the possible impossibility of finding a lodging at St. Sennans-on-Sea, and consoles itself with its intense improbability till the doctor finds it necessary to depart with the promptitude of a fire-engine suddenly rung up.

He had calculated his time to a nicety, for he met Sally just as "the other two" got safe round the corner.

"Oh no," said Fenwick, replying to a query ; "he doesn't mean to carry it all the way. He'll pick up a cab at the corner." The query was about the violoncello, and Fenwick was coming back to the room where his wife was closing the piano in anticipation of Anne. He had discreetly launched the instrument and its owner under the stars, and left the street door standing wide open—a shallow pretence that he believed Sally already in touch with it.

"They *are* a funny couple," Rosalind said. "Just fancy ! They've known each other two years, and there they are ! But I *do* like him. It's all his mother, you know. . . *what* is ? . . why, goose !—of course I mean he would speak at once if it wasn't for that obese mother of his."

"But she's so fond of Sally." In reply to this his wife kisses his cheeks, forehead, and chin consecutively, and he says it was right that time, only the other way round. This refers to a system founded on the crossing incident at Rheims.

"Of course she is, darling ; or pretends she is. But he can neither divorce his mamma nor ask the kitten to marry her. You see ?"

"I see—in fact, I've thought so myself. In confidence, you know. But is no compromise possible ?" Rosalind shakes a slow, regretful, negative head, and her lips form a silent "No !"

"Not with her. The woman has her own share of selfishness, and her son's, too. *He* has none."

“ But Sally.”

“ I see what you mean. Sally goes to the wall one way if she doesn't the other. So he works out selfish, poor dear fellow ! in the end. But, Gerry darling, let me tell you this : you have no idea how impossible that young man thinks it that a girl should love *him*. If he thought it possible the kitten really cared about, or could care about him, he'd go clean off his head. Indeed, I am right.”

“ Perhaps you are. There she is.”

Sally ran straight upstairs, leaving Anne to close the door. She at once discharged her mind of its burden, *more suo*.

“ Prosy thinks so, too !”

“ Thinks what ?”

“ Thinks they'll go and get married one fine morning, whether or no !”

But she seemed to be the only one much excited about this. Something was preoccupying the other two minds, and our Sally had not the remotest notion what.

Nevertheless, it came about that before the next Monday—the day of Sally's departure with her mother to St. Sennans-on-Sea—that young person paid a farewell visit to the obese mother of her medical adviser, and found her knitting.

“ That, my dear, is what I am constantly saying to Conrad,” was her reply to a suggestion of Sally's that she wanted change and rest. “ Only this very morning, when he came into my room to see that I had fresh-made toast—because you know, my dear, how tiresome servants are about toast—they make it overnight, and warm it up in the morning. Cook is no exception, and I have complained till I'm tired. I should be sorry to change, she's been here so long, but I did hear the other day of such a nice respectable person. . . .”

Sally interrupted, catching at a slight pause : “ But when Dr. Conrad came into your room, what did he say ?”

“ My dear, I was going to tell you.” She paused, with closed eyes and folded hands of aggressive patience, for all trace of human interruption to die down ; then resumed : “ I said to Conrad : ‘ I think you might have thought of that before.’ And then he was sorry. I will do him that justice. My dear boy has his faults, as I know too well, but he is always ready to admit he is wrong.”

"We can get you lodgings, you know," said Sally, from sheer intuition, for she had not a particle of information, so far, about what passed over the toast. The old lady seemed to think the conversation had been sufficiently well filled out, for she merely said, "Facing the sea," and went on knitting.

Sally and her mother knew St. Sennan well—had been at his watering-place twice before—so she was able, as it were, to forecast lodgings on the spot. "I dare say Mrs. Iggulden's is vacant," she said. "I wish you could have hers, she's such a nice old body. Her husband was a pilot, and she has one son a coast-guard and another in the navy. And one daughter has no legs, but can do shell-work; and the other's married a tax-collector."

But Goody Vereker was not going to be beguiled into making herself agreeable. She took up the attitude that Sally was young, and easily deceived. She threw a wet blanket over her narrative of the Iggulden family, and ignored any murmurs that came from beneath it. "Sea-faring folk are all alike," so she said. "When I was your age, my dear, I simply worshipped them. My father and all his brothers were devoted to the sea, and my Uncle David published an account of his visit to the Brazils. But you will learn by experience. At any rate, I trust there are no vermin. That is always my terror in these lodging-houses, and ill-aired beds."

Was it fair, Sally thought to herself, to expose that dear old Mrs. Iggulden, who lived in a wooden dwelling covered with tar, between two houses built of black shiny bricks, but consisting chiefly of bay-windows with elderly visitors in them looking through telescopes at the shipping, and telling the credulous it was brigs or schooners—was it fair to expose Mrs. Iggulden to this gilt-spectacled lob-worm? Sally didn't know that Mrs. Iggulden could show a proper spirit, because in her own case the conditions had never been favourable. They had practised no incantations.

"Very well, then, Mrs. Vereker. As soon as ever mamma and I have shaken down, we'll see about Iggulden's; and if they can't take you, somebody else will."

"I am in your hands," said the Goody, smiling faintly and submissively. She leaned back with her eyes closed, and was afraid she had done too much. She used to have periodical convictions to that effect.

Sally had an appointment with Lætitia Wilson at the



swimming bath, so the Goody, in an access of altruism, perceived that she mustn't keep her. She herself would try to rest a little.

All people, as we suppose, lead two lives, more or less—their outer life, that of the world and action, and an inner life they have all to themselves. But how different is the proportion of the two lives in different subjects! And how much less painful the latter life is when we feel we could tell it all if we chose. Only we don't choose, because it's no concern of yours or anyone else's.

This was Sally's frame of mind. She would not have felt the ghost of a reserve of an inmost thought (from her mother, for instance) in the face of questions asked, though she kept her own counsel about many points whose elucidation was not called for. It may easily be that Rosalind asked no questions about some things, because she had no wish that her daughter should formulate their answers too decisively. Her relation with Conrad Vereker, for example. Was it love, or what? If there was to be marrying, and families, and that sort of thing, and possible interference with swimming-matches and athletics, and so on, would she as soon choose this man for her accomplice as any other she knew? Suppose she was to hear to-morrow that Dr. Vereker was engaged to Sylvia Peplow, would she be glad or sorry?

Rosalind certainly did ask no such questions. If she had, the answers to the first two would have been, we surmise, very clear and decisive. What nonsense! Fancy Prosy being in love with anybody, or anybody being in love with Prosy! And as for marrying, the great beauty of it all was that there was to be no marrying. Did he understand that? Oh dear, yes! Prosy understood quite well. But we wonder, is the image our mind forms of Sally's answer to the third question correct or incorrect? It presents her to us as answering rather petulantly: "Why *shouldn't* Dr. Conrad marry Miss Peplow, if he likes, and *she* likes? I dare say *she'd* be ready enough, though!" and then pretending to look out of the window. And shortly afterwards: "I suppose Prosy has a right to his private affairs, as much as I have to mine." But with lips that tighten over her speech, without a smile. Note that this is all pure hypothesis.

But she had nothing to conceal that she knew of, had Sally.

What a difference there was between her inner world and her mother's, who could not breathe a syllable of that world's history to any living soul !

Rosalind acknowledged to herself now how great the relief had been when, during the few hours that passed between her communication to her old friend on his deathbed and the last state of insensibility from which he never rallied, there had actually been on this earth one other than herself who knew all her story and its strange outcome. For those few hours she had not been alone, and the memory of it helped her to bear her present loneliness. She could hear again, when she woke in the stillness of the night, the voice of the old man, a whisper struggling through his half-choked respiration, that said again and again : " Oh, Rosey darling ! can it be true ? Thank God ! thank God !" And the fact that what she had then feared had never come to pass—the fact that, contrary to her expectations, he had been strangely able to look the wonder in the face, and never flinch from it, seeing nothing in it but a priceless boon—this fact seemed to give her now the fortitude to bear without help the burden of her knowledge—the knowledge of who he was, this man that was beside her in the stillness, this man whose steady breathing she could hear, whose heart-beats she could count. And her heart dwelt on the old soldier's last words, strangely, almost incredibly, resonant, a hard-won victory in his dying fight for speech, " Evil has turned to good. God be praised !" It had almost seemed as if the parting soul, on the verge of the strangest chance man has to face, lost all measure of the strangeness of any earthly thing, and was sensible of nothing but the wonderment of the great cause of all.

But one thing that she knew (and could not explain) was that this secret knowledge, burdensome in itself, relieved the oppression of one still more burdensome, and helped her to drive it from her thoughts. We speak of the collision of the record in her mind of what her daughter was, and whence, with the fact that Sally was winding herself more and more, daughterwise, round the heart of the man whose bond with her mother she, small and unconscious, had had so large a share in rending asunder twenty years ago. It was to her, in its victory over crude physical fact, even while it oppressed her, a bewildering triumph of spirit over matter, of soul over sense, this firm consolidating growth of an affection such as Nature means, but often fails to reach, between child and parent. And as it grew

and grew, her child's actual paternity shrank and dwindled, until it might easily have been held a matter for laughter, but for the black cloud of Devildom that hung about it, and stamped her as the infant of a Nativity in the Venusberg, whose growing after-life had gone far to shroud the horror of its lurid caverns with a veil of oblivion.

We say all these things quite seriously of our Sally, in spite of her incorrigible slanginess and vulgarity. We can now go on to St. Sennans-on-Sea, where we shall find her in full blow, but very sticky with the salt water she passes really too much of her time in, even for a merpussy.



## CHAPTER XXVII

ST. SENNANS-ON-SEA consists of two parts—the new and the old. The old part is a dear little old place, and the new part is beastly. So Sally says, and she must know, because this is her third visit.

The old part consists of Mrs. Iggulden's and the houses we have described on either side of her, and maybe two dozen more wooden or black-brick dwellings of the same sort; also of the beach and its interesting lines of breakwater that are so very jolly to jump off or to lie down and read novels under in the sea smell. Only not too near the drains, if you know it. If you don't know it, it doesn't matter so much, because the smell reminds you of the seaside, and seems right and fitting. You must take care how you jump, though, off these breakwaters, because where they are not washed inconceivably clean, and all their edges smoothed away beyond belief by the tides that come and go for ever, they are slippery with green sea-ribbons that cling close to them, and green sea-fringes that cling closer still, and brown sea-ramifications that are studded with pods that pop if you tread on them, but are not quite so slippery; only you may just as well be careful, even with them. And we should recommend you, before you jump, to be sure you are not hooked over a bolt, not merely because you may get caught, and fall over a secluded reading-public on the other side, but because the red rust comes off on you and soils your white petticoat.

If you don't mind jumping off these breakwaters—and it really is rather a lark—you may tramp along the sea front quite near up to where the fishing-luggers lie, each with a capstan all to itself, under the little extra old town the red-tanned fishing-nets live in, in houses that are like sailless windmill-tops whose plank walls have almost merged their outlines in innumerable coats of tar, laid by long generations back of the forefathers of

the men in oil-cloth head-and-shoulder hats who repair their nets for ever in the Channel wind, unless you want a boat to-day, in which case they will scull you about, while you absolutely ache sympathetically with their efforts, of which they themselves remain serenely unaware, till you've been out long enough. Then they beach you cleverly on the top of a wave, and their family circle seizes you, boat and all, and runs you up the shingle before the following wave can catch you and splash you, which it wants to do.

There is an aroma of the Norman Conquest and of Domesday Book about the old town. Research will soon find out, if she looks sharp, that there is nothing Norman in the place except the old arch in the amorphous church-tower, and a castle at a distance on the flats. But the flavour of the past is stronger in the scattered memories of bygone sea-battles not a century ago, and the names of streets that do not antedate the Georges, than in these mere scraps that are always open to the reproach of mediævalism, and are separated from us by a great gulf. And it doesn't much matter to us whether the memories are of victory or defeat, or the names those of sweeps or heroes. All's one to us—we glow; perhaps rashly, for, you see, we really know very little about them. And he who has read no history to speak of, if he glows about the past on the strength of his imperfect data, may easily break his molasses-jug.

So, whether our blood is stirred by Nelson and Trafalgar, whereof we have read, or by the Duke of York and Walcheren, whereof we haven't—or mighty little—we feel in touch with both these heroes, for they are modern. Both have columns, anyhow; and we can dwell upon their triumph or defeat almost as if it wasn't history at all, but something that really happened, without running any risk of being accused of archaism or of deciphering musty tomes. And we can enjoy our expedition all the same to the ruined keep in the level pastures, where the long-horned black cattle stand and think and flap their tails still, just as they did in the days when the basement dungeons, now choked up, held real prisoners with real broken hearts.

But there is modern life, too, at St. Sennans—institutions that keep abreast of the century. Half the previous century ago, when we went there first, the Circulating Library consisted, so far as we can recollect it, of a net containing bright leather balls, a collection of wooden spades and wheelbarrows, a glass jar with powder-puffs, another with tooth-brushes, a rocking-

horse—rashly stocked in the first heated impulse of an over-confident founder—a few other trifles, and, most important of all, a book-case that supplied the title-rôle to the performance. That book-case contained (we are confident) *editiones principes* of Mrs. Ratcliff, Sir Walter Scott, Bulwer Lytton, Currer Bell . . . well, even Fanny Burney, if you come to that. There certainly was a copy of *Frankenstein*, and fifty years ago our flesh was so compliant as to creep during its perusal. It wouldn't now.

But even fifty years ago there was never a volume that had not been defaced out of all knowledge by crooked marks of the most inquisitive interrogation, and straight marks of the most indignant astonishment, by the reading-public in the shadows of the breakwaters. It really read, that public did ; and, what's more, it often tore out the interesting bits to take away. I remember great exasperation when a sudden veil was drawn over the future of two lovers just as the young gentleman had flung himself into the arms of the young lady. An unhallowed fiend had cut off the sequel with scissors and boned it !

That was done, or much of it, when the books were new, and the railway-station was miles away ; when the church wasn't new, but old, which was better. It has been made new since, and has chairs in it, and memorial windows by Stick and Co. In those days its Sunday-folk were fisherfolk mostly, and a few local magnates or parvates—squirophants, they might be called—and a percentage of the visitors.

Was St. Sennan glad or sorry, we wonder, when the last two sorts subscribed and restored him ? If we had been he, one of us would have had to have the temper of a saint to keep cool about it. Anyhow, it's done now, and can't be undone.

But the bathing-machines are not restored, at any rate. Those indescribables yonder, half rabbit-hutch, half dry-dock—a long row for ladies and a short one for gentlemen, three hundred yards apart—couldn't trust 'em any nearer, bless you !—these superannuated God-knows-whats, struggling against disintegration from automatic plunges down a rugged beach, and creaking journeys back you are asked to hold on through—it's no use going on drying !—these tributes to public decorum you can find no room in, and probably swear at—no sacrilegious restorer has laid his hand on these. They evidently contemplate going on for ever ; for though their axes grow more and more oblique every day, their self-confidence remains unshaken. But then,



they think they *are* St. Sennans, and that the wooden houses are subordinate accidents, and the church a mere tributary that was a little premature—got there first, in its hurry to show respect for *them*. And no great wonder, seeing what a figure they cut, seen from a boat when you have a row! Or, rather, used to cut; for now the new town (which is beastly) has come on the cliff above, and looks for all the world as if *it* was St. Sennans, and speaks contemptuously of the real town as the Beach Houses.

The new town can only be described as a tidy nightmare; yet it is a successful creation of the brains that conceived it—a successful creation of ground-rents. As a development of land ripe for building, with more yards of frontage to the main-road than at first sight geometry seems able to accommodate, it has been taking advantage of unrivalled opportunities for a quarter of a century, backed by advances on mortgage. It is the envy of the neighbouring proprietors east and west along the coast, who have developed their own eligible sites past all remedy and our endurance, and now have to drain their purses to meet the obligations to the professional mortgagee, who is biding his hour in peace, waiting for the fruit to fall into his mouth and murderously sure of his prey. But at St. Sennans a mysterious silence reigns behind a local office that yields keys on application, and answers all inquiries, and asks ridiculous rents. And this silence, or its keeper, is said to have become enormously rich over the new town.

The shareholders in the St. Sennans Hotel, Limited, cannot have become rich. If they had, surely they would provide something better for a hungry paying supplicant than a scorched greasy chop, inflamed at the core, and glass bottles containing a little pellucid liquid that parts with its carbon dioxide before you can effect a compromise with the cork, which pushes in, but not so as to attain its ideal. So your Seltzer water doesn't pour fast enough to fizz outside the bottle, and your heart is sad. Of course, you can have wine, if you come to that, for look at the wine-list! Only the company's ideas of the value of wine are not limited, and if you decide not to be sordid, and order a three-shilling bottle of Médoc, you will find its contents to be very limited indeed. But why say more than that it is an enormous hotel at the seaside? You know all about them, and what it feels like in rainy weather, when the fat gentleman has got to-day's "Times," and means to read all through the

advertisement-column before he gives up the leaders, and you have to spend your time turning over thick and shiny snapshot journals with a surfeit of pictures in them ; or the Real Lady, or the Ladylike Lady, or the Titled Lady, the portraits of whom—one or other of them—sweep in curves about their folio pages ; and, while they fascinate you, make you feel that you would falter on the threshold of matrimony if only because they couldn't possibly take nourishment. Would not the discomfort of meals eaten with a companion who could swallow nothing justify a divorce *a mensa* ?

A six-shilling volume might be written about the New Hotel, with an execration on every page. Don't let us have anything to do with it, but keep as much as possible at the Sea Houses under the cliff, which constitute the only St. Sennans necessary to this story. We shall be able to do so, because when Mrs. and Mr. Fenwick and their daughter went for a walk they always went up the cliff-pathway, which had steps cut in the chalk, past the boat upside down, where new-laid eggs could be bought from a coastguard's wife. And this path avoided the New Town altogether, and took them straight to the cliff-track that skirted growing wheat and blazing poppies till you began to climb the smooth hill-pasture the foolish wheat had encroached upon in the Protection days, when it was worth more than South Down mutton. And now every ear of it would have been repenting in sackcloth and ashes if it had been qualified by Nature to know how little it would fetch per bushel. But it wasn't. And when, the day after their arrival, Rosalind and her husband were on the beach talking of taking a walk up that way when Sally came out, it could have heard, if it would only have stood still, the sheep-bells on the slopes above reproaching it, and taunting it with its usurpation and its fruitless end. Perhaps it was because it felt ashamed that it stooped before the wind that carried the reproachful music, and drowned it in a silvery rustle. The barley succeeded the best. You listen to the next July barley-field you happen on, and hear what it can do when a breeze comes with no noise of its own.

Down below on the shingle the sun was hot, and the tide was high, and the water was clear and green close to the shore, and jelly-fish abounded. You could look down into the green from the last steep ridge at high-water mark, and if you looked sharp you might see one abound. Only you had to be on the alert to jump back if a heave of the green transparency surged across



the little pebbles that could gobble it up before it was all over your feet—but didn't this time. Oh dear!—how hot it was! Sally had the best of it. For the allusion to Sally's "coming out" referred to her coming out of the water, and she was staying in a long time.

"That child's been twenty-four minutes already," said her mother, consulting her watch. "Just look at her out there on the horizon. What on earth *are* they doing?"

It *was* a little inexplicable. At that moment Sally and her friend—it was one Fraulein Braun, who had learned swimming in the baths on the Rhone at Geneva and in Paris—appeared to be nothing but two heads, one close behind the other, moving slowly on the water. Then the heads parted company, and apparently their owners lay on their backs in the water, and kicked up the British Channel.

"They're saving each other's lives," said Gerry. He got up from a nice intaglio he had made to lie in, and after shaking off a good bushel of small pebbles a new-made beach-acquaintance of four had heaped upon him, resorted to a double opera-glass to see them better. "The kitten wanted me to get out of my depth for her to tow me in. But I didn't fancy it. Besides, a sensitive British public would have been scandalised."

"You never learned to swim, then, Gerry——?" She just stopped herself in time. The words "after all" were on her lips. Without them her speech was mere chat; with them it would have been a match to a mine. She sometimes wished in these days that the mine might explode of itself, and give her peace.

"I suppose I never did," replied her husband, as a matter of course. "At least, I couldn't do it when I tried in the water just now. I should imagine I must have tried B.C., or I shouldn't have known how to try. It's not a thing one forgets, so they say." He paused a few seconds, and then added: "Anyhow, it's quite certain I couldn't do it." There was not a trace of consciousness on his part of anything in *her* mind beyond what her words implied. But she felt in peril of fire, so close to him, with a resurrection of an image in it—a vivid one—of the lawn-tennis garden of twenty years ago, and the speech of his friend, the real Fenwick, about his inability to swim.

This sense of peril did not diminish as he continued: "I've found out a lot of things I *can* do in the way of athletics, though; I seem to know how to wrestle, which is very funny. I wonder where I learned. And you saw how I could ride at Sir Mount-



massingham's last month?" This referred to a country visit, which has not come into our story. "And that was very funny about the boxing. Such a peaceful old fogey as your husband! Wasn't it, Rosey darling?"

"Why won't you call the Bart. by his proper name, Gerry? Wasn't what?"

"Funny about the gloves. You know that square fellow? He was a well-known prize-fighter that young Sales Wilson had picked up and brought down to teach the boys. You remember him? He went to church, and was very devout. . . ."

"I remember."

"Well, it was in the billiard-room, after dinner. He said quite suddenly, 'This gentleman now can make use of his daddles. I can see it in him'—meaning me. 'What makes you think that, Mr. Macmorrough?' said I. 'We of the fancy, sir,' says he, 'see these things, without referrin' to no books, by the light of Nature.' And next day we had a set-to with the gloves, and his verdict was 'Only just short of professional.' Those boys were delighted. I wonder how and when I became such a dab at it?"

"I wonder!" Rosalind doesn't seem keen on the subject. "I wish those crazy girls would begin to think of coming in. If it's going to be like this every day I shall go home to London, Gerry."

"Perhaps when Vereker comes down on Monday he'll be able to influence. Medical authority!"

Here the beach-acquaintance, who had kept up a musical undercurrent of disjointed comment, perceived an opportunity for joining more actively in the conversation.

"My mummar says—my mummar says—my mummar says. . . ."

"Yes—little pet—what does she say?" Thus Rosalind.

"Yes—Miss Gwendolen Arkwright—what does she say?" Thus Fenwick, on whom Miss Arkwright is seated.

"My mummar says se wisses us not to paggle Tundy when the tideses goed out. But my mummar says—my mummar says. . . ."

"Yes, darling."

"My mummar says we must paggle Monday up to here." Miss Arkwright indicates the exact high-water mark sanctioned, candidly. "Wiv no sooze, and no stottins!" She then becomes diffuse. "And my bid sister Totey's doll came out in

my bed, and Dane dusted her out with a duster. And I can do thums. And they make free. . . ." At this point Miss Arkwright's copy runs short, and she seizes the opportunity for a sort of seated dance of satisfaction at her own eloquence—a kind of subjective horsemanship.

"I wish I never had to do any sums that made more than three," is the putative horse's comment. "But there are only two possible, alas! And the totals are stale, as you might say."

"I'm afraid my little girl's being troublesome." Thus the mamma, looking round a huge groin of breakwater a few yards off.

"Troublesome, madame?" exclaims Fenwick, using French unexpectedly. "She's the best company in Sussex." But Miss Arkwright's nurse Jane domineers into the peaceful circle with a clairvoyance that Miss Gwendolen is giving trouble, and bears her away rebellious.

"What a shame!" says Gerry *sotto voce*. "But I wonder why I said 'madame'!"

"I remember you said it once before." And she means to add "the first time you saw me," but dubs it, in thought, a needless lie, and substitutes, "that day when you were electrocuted." And then imagines she has flinched, and adds her original text boldly. She isn't sorry when her husband merely says, "That was queer too!" and remains looking through his glass at the swimmers.

"They're coming at last—a couple of young monkeys!" is her comment. And, sure enough, after a very short spell of stylish sidestrokes Sally's voice and laugh are within hearing ahead of her companion's more guttural intonation. Her mother draws a long breath of relief as the merpussy vanishes under her awning, and is shouted and tapped at to hold tight, while capstan-power tugs and strains to bring her dressing-room up a sharp slope out of reach of the sea.

"Well, Jeremiah, and what have *you* got to say for yourself?" said the merpussy soon after, just out of her machine, with a huge mass of briny black hair spread out to dry. The tails had to be split and sorted and shaken out at intervals to give the air a chance. Sally was blue and sticky all over, and her finger-tips and nails all one colour. But her spirits were boisterous.

"What about?"

"What about, indeed? About not coming into the water

to be pulled out. You promised you would, you know you did !”

“I did ; but subject to a reasonable interpretation of the compact. I should have been out of my depth ever so long before you could reach me. Why didn’t you come closer ?”

“How could I, with a fat, pink party drying himself next door ? You wouldn’t have, if it had been you, and him Goody Vereker. . . .”

“Sal-ly ! Darling !” Her mother remonstrates.

“We-ell, there’s nothing in that ! As if we didn’t all know what the Goody would look like. . . .”

Rosalind is really afraid that the strict mamma of her husband’s recent incubus will overhear, and sit at another breakwater next day. “Come along !” she says, dispersively and emphatically. “We shall have the shoulder of mutton spoiled.”

“No, we shan’t ! Shall we, Jeremiah ? We’ve talked it over, me and Jeremiah. Haven’t we, Gaffer Fenwick ?” She is splitting up the salt congestions of his mane as she sits by him on the shingle. He confirms her statement.

“We have. And we have decided that if we are two hours late it may be done enough. But that in any case the so-called gravy will be grey hot water.”

“Get up and come along, and don’t be a mad kitten ! I shall go and leave you two behind. So now you know.” And Rosalind goes away up the shingle.

“What makes mother look so serious sometimes, kitten ? She did just now.”

“She’s jealous of you and me flirting like we do. Don’t put your hat on ; let the sun dry you up a bit. Does she really look serious, though ? Do you mean it ?”

“Yes, I mean it. It comes and goes. But when I ask her she only laughs at me.” A painful thought crosses Sally’s mind. Is it possible that some of her reckless escapades have *froissé’d* her mother ? She goes off into a moment’s contemplation, then suddenly jumps up with, “Come along, Jeremiah,” and follows her up the beach.

But the gravity on the face of the latter, by now half-way to the house, had nothing to do with any of Sally’s shocking vulgarities and outrageous utterances. No, nor even with the green-eyed monster Jealousy her unscrupulous effrontery had not hesitated to impute. She allowed it to dominate her expression, as there was no one there to see, until the girl overtook



her. Then she wrenched her face and her thoughts apart with a smile. "You *are* a mad little goose," said she.

But the thing that weighted her mind—oppressed or puzzled her, as might be—what was it?

Had she been obliged to answer the question off-hand she herself might have been at a loss to word it, though she knew quite well what it was. It was the old clash between the cause of Sally and its result. It was the thought that, but for a memory that every year seemed to call for a stronger forgetfulness, a more effective oblivion, this little warm star that had shone upon and thawed a frozen life, this salve for the wound it sprang from, would have remained unborn—a nonentity! Yes, she might have had another child—true! But would that child have been Sally?

She was so engrossed with her husband, and he with her, that she felt she could, as it were, have trusted him with his own identity. But, then, how about Sally? Though she might with time show him the need for concealment, how be sure that nothing should come out in the very confusion of the springing of the mine? She could trust him with his identity—yes! Not Sally with hers. Her great surpassing terror was—do you see?—not the effect on *him* of learning about Sally's strange *provenance*, but for Sally herself. The terrible knowledge she could not grasp the facts without would cast a shadow over her whole life.

So she thought and turned and looked down on the beach. There below her was this unsolved mystery sitting in the sun beside the man whose life it had rent asunder from its mother's twenty years ago. And as Rosalind looked at her she saw her capture and detain his hat. "To let his mane dry, I suppose," said Rosalind. "I hope he won't get a sunstroke." She watched them coming up the shingle, and decided that they were going on like a couple of school-children. They were, rather.

Perhaps the image in Sally's profane mind of "hers affectionately, Rebecca Vereker," before or after an elderly bathe, would not have appeared there if she had not received that morning a letter so signed, announcing that, subject to a variety of fulfilments—among which the Will of God had quite a conspicuous place—she and her son would make their appearance next Monday, as our text has already hinted. On which day the immature legs of Miss Gwendolen Arkwright were to be

released from a seclusion by which some religious object, undefined, had been attained the day before.

But the conditions which had to be complied with by the lodgings it would be possible for this lady to occupy were such as have rarely been complied with, even in houses built specially to meet their requirements. Each window had to confront, not a particular quarter, but a particular ninetieth, of the compass. A full view of the sea had to be achieved from a sitting-room not exposed to its glare, an attribute destructive of human eyesight, and fraught with curious effects on the nerves. But the bedrooms had to look in directions foreign to human experience—directions from which no wind ever came at night. A house of which every story rotated on an independent vertical axis might have answered—nothing else would. Even then space would have called for modification, and astronomy and meteorology would have had to be patched up. Then with regard to the different levels of the floors, concession was implied to “a flat”; but, stairways granted, the risers were to be at zero, and the treads at boiling-point—a strained simile! As to cookery, the services of a *chef* with great powers of self-subordination seemed to be pointed at, a *cordon-bleu* ready to work in harness. Hygienic precautions, such as might have been insisted on by an Athanasian sanitary inspector on the premises of an Arian householder, were made a *sine qua non*. Freedom from vibration from vehicles was so firmly stipulated for that nothing short of a balloon from Shepherd’s Bush could possibly have met the case. The only relaxation in favour of the possible was a diseased readiness to accept shakedowns, sandwiches standing, cuts off the cold mutton, and snacks generally on behalf of her son.

Mrs. Iggulden, who was empty both sets on Monday, didn’t answer in any one particular to any of these requisitions. But a spirit of overgrown compromise crept in, making a sufficient number of reasons why no one of them could be complied with, an equivalent of compliance itself. Only in respect of certain racks and tortures for the doctor was Mrs. Iggulden induced to lend herself to dangerous innovation. “I can’t have poor Prosy put to sleep in a bed like this,” said Sally, punching in the centre of one, and finding a hideous cross-bar. Either Mrs. Iggulden’s nephew must saw it out, and tighten up the sacking from end to end, or she must get a Christian bed. Poor Prosy! Whereon Mrs. Iggulden explained that her nephew had by an

act of self-sacrifice surrendered this bed as a luxury for lodgers in the season, having himself a strong congenital love of bisection. He hadn't slept nigh so sound two months past, and the cross-bar would soothe his slumbers.

So it was finally settled that the Goody and her son should come to Iggulden's, the question of which set she should occupy being left open until she should have inspected the stairs. Thereon Mrs. Iggulden's nephew, whose name was Solomon, contrived a chair to carry the good lady up them; which she, though faint, declined to avail herself of when she arrived, perhaps seeing her way to greater embarrassment for her species by being supported slowly upstairs with a gasp at each step, and a moan at intervals. However, she was got up in the end, and thought she could take a little milk with a teaspoonful of brandy in it.

But as to giving any conception of the difficulties that arose at this point in determining the choice between above and below, that must be left to your imagination. A conclusion *was* arrived at in time—in a great deal of it—and the Goody was actually settled on the ground floor at Mrs. Iggulden's, and contriving to battle against collapse from exhaustion with an implication that she had no personal interest in reviving, but would do it for the sake of others.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

FENWICK was not a witness of this advent, as the Monday on which it happened had seen his return to town. He had had his preliminary week, and his desk was crying aloud for him. He departed, renewing a solemn promise to write every day as the train came into the little station at Egbert's Road, for St. Sennans and Growborough. It is only a single line, even now, to St. Sennans from here, but as soon as it was done it was good-bye to all peace and quiet for St. Sennan.

Rosalind and her daughter came back in the omnibus—not the one for the hotel, but the one usually spoken of as Padlock's—the one that lived at the Admiral Collingwood, the nearest approach to an inn in the old town. The word "omnibus" applied to it was not meant literally by Padlock, but only as a declaration of his indifference as to which four of the planet's teeming millions rode in it. This time there was no one else except a nice old farmer's wife, who spoke *to* each of the ladies as "my dear," and *of* each of them as "your sister." Rosalind was looking wonderfully young and handsome, certainly. They secured all the old lady's new-laid eggs, because there would be Mrs. Vereker in the evening. We like adhering to these ellipses of daily life.

Next morning Sally took Dr. Vereker for a walk round to show him the place. Try to fancy the condition of a young man of about thirty, who had scarcely taken his hand from the plough of general practice for four years—for his holidays had been mighty insignificant—suddenly inaugurating three weeks of paradise in *the* society man most covets—of delicious seclusion remote from patients, a happy valley where stethoscopes might be forgotten, and carbolic acid was unknown, where diagnosis ceased from troubling, and prognosis was at rest. He got so intoxicated with Sally that he quite forgot to care if the cases he had left to Mr. Neckitt (who had been secured as a substitute

after all) survived or got terminated fatally. Bother them and their moist *râles* and cardiac symptoms, and effusions of blood on the brain !

Dr. Conrad was a young man of an honest and credulous nature, with a turn for music naturally, and an artificial bias towards medicine infused into him by his father, who had died while he was yet a boy. His honesty had shown itself in the loyalty with which he carried out his father's wishes, and his credulity in the readiness with which he accepted his mother's self-interested versions of his duty towards herself. She had given him to understand from his earliest years that she was an unselfish person, and entitled to be ministered unto, and that it was the business of every one else to see that she did not become the victim of her own self-sacrifice. At the date of this writing her son was passing through a stage of perplexity about his duty to her in its relation to his possible duty to a wife undefined. That he might not be embarrassed by too many puzzles at once, he waived the question of who this wife was to be, and ignored the fact that would have been palpable to any true reading of his mind, that if it had not been for Miss Sally Nightingale this perplexity might never have existed. He satisfied his conscience on the point by a pretext that Sally was a thing on a pinnacle out of his reach—not for the likes of him ! He made believe that he was at a loss to find a foothold on his greasy pole, but was seeking one in complete ignorance of what would be found at the top of it.

This shallow piece of self-deception was ripe for disillusionment when Sally took its victim out for a walk round to show him the place. It had the feeblest hold on existence during the remainder of the day, throughout which our medical friend went on dram-drinking, knowing the dangers of his nectar-draughts, but as helpless against them as any other dram-drinker. It broke down completely and finally between moonrise and midnight—a period that began with Sally calling under Iggulden's window, "Come out, Dr. Conrad, and see the phosphorescence in the water ; it's going to be quite bright presently," and ended with, "Good gracious, how late it is ! Shan't we catch it ?" an exclamation both contributed to. For it was certainly past eleven o'clock.

But in that little space it had broken down, that delusion ; and the doctor knew perfectly well, before ten o'clock, certainly, that all the abstract possible wives of his perplexity meant

Sally, and Sally only. And, further, that Sally was at every point of the compass—that she was in the phosphorescence of the sea, and the still golden colour of the rising moon. That space was full of her, and that each little wave-splash at their feet said “Sally,” and then gave place to another that said “Sally” again. Poor Prosy!

But what did *they* say, the two of them? Little enough—mere merry chat. But on his part so rigid a self-constraint underlying it that we are not sure some of the little waves didn’t say—not Sally at all, but—Miss Nightingale! And a persistent sense of a thought that was only waiting to be thought as soon as he should be alone—that was going to run somewhat thus: “How could it come about? That this girl, whom I idolize till my idolatry is almost pain; this girl who has been my universe this year past, though I would not confess it; this wonder whom I judge no man worthy of, myself least of all—that she should be cancelled, made naught of, hushed down, to be the mate of a poor G.P.; to visit his patients and leave cards, make up his little accounts, perhaps! Certainly to live with his mother. . . .” But he knew under the skin that he would be even with that disloyal thought, and would stop it off at this point in time to believe he hadn’t thought it.

Still, for all that this disturbing serpent would creep into his Eden, for all that he would have given worlds to dare a little more—that moment in the moonlight, with the glow-flecked water at his feet and hers, and the musical shingle below, and a sense of Christy Minstrels singing about Billy Pattison somewhere in the warm night-air above, and the flash of the great revolving light along the coast answering the French lights across the great, dark, silent sea—that moment was the record moment of his life till then. It would never do to say so to Sally, that was all! But it was true for all that. For his life had been a dull one, and the only comfort he could get out of the story of it so far was that at least there was no black page in it he would like to cut out. Sally might read them all, and welcome. Their relation to *her* had become the point to consider. You see, at heart he was a slow-coach, a milksop, nothing of the man of the world about him. Well, her race had had a dose of the other sort in the last generation. Had the breed wearied of it? Was that Sally’s unconscious reason for liking him?

“How very young Prosy has got all of a sudden!” was Sally’s postscript to this interview, as she walked back to their own



lodgings with her mother, who had been relieving guard with the selfless one while the doctor went out to see the phosphorescence.

"He's like a boy out for a holiday," her mother answered. "I had no idea Dr. Conrad could manage such a colour as that; I thought he was pallid and studious."

"Poor dear! *We* should be pallid and studious if it was cases all day long, and his ma at intervals."

"Do you know, kitten darling, I can't help thinking perhaps we do that poor woman an injustice. . . ."

"Can't you?" Thus Sally in a parenthetical voice—

"... and that she really isn't such a very great humbug after all!"

"Why not?"

"Because she would be such a *very* great humbug, don't you see, chick?"

"Why shouldn't she? Somebody must, or there'd be no such thing."

"Why should there be any such thing?"

"Because of the word. Somebody must, or there'd be no one to hook it to. . . . Have they stopped, I wonder, or are they going to begin again?" This referred to the Ethiopian banjos afar. "I do declare they're going to sing 'Pesky Jane,' and it's nearly twelve o'clock!"

"Never mind *them*! How came *you* to know all the vulgar nigger-songs? . . . I was going to say. It's very difficult to believe it's quite all humbug when one hears her talk about her son and his welfare, and his prospects and . . ."

"I know what she talked about. When her dear son marries, she's going to devote herself to him and her dear daughter that will be. Wasn't that it?"

"Yes; but then, she couldn't say more than that all she had would be theirs, and she would take her to her bosom, etcetera. Could she?"

"She'll have to pull a long way!" The vulgar child's mind has flown straight to the Goody's outline in profile. She is quite incorrigible. "But wasn't that what old Mr. Turveydrop said, or very nearly? Of course, one has to consider the parties and make allowance."

"Sallykin, what a madcap you are! You don't care *what* you say."

"We-e-ell! there's nothing in that. . . . But look here, mammy darling. Did that good woman in all she said to-night—

all the time she was jawing—did she once lose sight of her meritorious attitude ?”

“ It may only be a *façon de parler*—a sort of habit.”

“ But it isn’t. Jeremiah says so. We’ve talked it over, us two. He says he wouldn’t like his daughter—meaning me—to marry poor Prosy. because of the Goody.”

“ Are you sure he meant you ? Did you ask him ?”

“ No, because I wasn’t going to twit Jeremiah with being only step. We kept it dark who was what. But, of course, he meant me. Like a submarine telegraph.” Sally stopped a moment in gravity. Then she said : “ Mother dear !”

“ What, kitten ?”

“ What a pity it is Jeremiah is only step ! Just think how nice if he’d been real. Now, if you’d only met twenty years sooner. . . .”

A nettle to grasp presented itself—a bad one. Rosalind seized it boldly. “ I shouldn’t have had my kitten,” she said.

“ I see. I should have been somebody else. But that wouldn’t have mattered to me.”

“ It would have—to me !” But this is the most she can do in the way of nettle-grasping. She is glad when St. Sennan, from his tower with the undoubted piece of Norman, begins to count twelve, and gives her an excuse for a recall to duty. “ Do think how we’re keeping poor Mrs. Lobjoit up, you unfeeling child !” is her appeal on behalf of their own fisherman’s wife. Sally is just taking note of a finale of the Ethiop choir. “ They’ve done ‘Pesky Jane,’ and they’re going away to bed,” she says. “ How the black must come off on the sheets !” And then they hurried home to sleep sound.

But there was little sleep for the doctor that night, perhaps because he had got so young all of a sudden. So it didn’t matter much that his mother countermanded his proposal that bed should be gone to, on the ground that it was so late now that she wouldn’t be able to sleep a wink. If she *could* have gone an hour ago it would have been different. Now it was too late. An aggressive submissiveness was utilised by the good lady to the end of his discomfort and that of Mrs. Iggulden, who—perhaps from some memories of the Norman Conquest hanging about the neighbourhood—would never go to bed as long as a light was burning in the house.

“ It is very strange and most unusual, I know,” she continued saying after she had scarified a place to scratch on. “ Your

great-uncle Everett Gayler did not scruple to call it phenomenal, and that when I was the merest child. After eleven no sleep!" She continued her knitting with tenacity to illustrate her wakefulness. "But I am glad, dear Conrad, that you forgot about me. You were in pleasanter society than your old mother's. No one shall have any excuse for saying I am a burden on my son. No, my dear boy, my wish is that you shall feel *free*." She laid aside the knitting-needles, and folding her hands across the outline Sally was to be dragged up, or along, dropped her eyelids over a meek glare, and sat with a fixed, submissive undersmile slightly turned towards her son.

"But I thought, mother, as Mrs. Fenwick was here..." Slow, slight, acquiescent nods stopped him; they were enough to derail any speech except the multiplication-table or the House-that-Jack-built! But she waited with exemplary patience for certainty that the train had stopped. Then spoke as one that gives a commission to speech, and observes its execution at a distance. Her expression remained immutable. "She is a well-meaning person," said she.

"I didn't know how late it was." Poor Dr. Conrad gives up self-defence—climbs down. "The time ran away." It *had* done so, there was no doubt about that.

"And you forgot your mother. But Mrs. Fenwick is a well-meaning person. We will say no more about it."

Whereupon her son, feeling that silence is golden, said nothing. But he went and kissed her for all that. She said inscrutably: "You might have kissed me." But whether she was or wasn't referring to the fact that she had succeeded in negotiating his kiss on the rim of her spectacles, Conrad couldn't tell. Probably she meant he might have kissed her before.

There was no doubt, however, about her intention of knitting till past one in the morning. She did it, enlarging on the medical status of her illustrious uncle, Dr. Everett Gayler, who had just crept into the conversation. Her son wasn't so sorry for this as Mrs. Iggulden, who dozed and waked with starts, on principle, outside in the passage unseen. *He* could stand at the wide-open window, and hear the little waves plash "Sally" in the moonlight, and the counter-music of the down-drawn shingle echo "Sally" back. Sometimes the pebbles and the water gave place for a moment to the tread of two persistent walkers up and down—men who smoked cigars, and became a little audible and died again at every time of passing.



One time the doctor caught a rise of voice—though they did not pass so very near—that said: “My idea is to stay here till. . . .”

Then at the next turn the same voice grew from inaudibility to . . . “So I arranged with the parson here for to-morrow, and we shall get . . .” and died again. At this moment Dr. Everett Gayler was at the climax of his fame, having just performed tracheotomy on the Grand Duke of Hesse-Junkerstadt, and been created Knight-Commander of some Order whose name Mrs. Vereker wasn’t sure about.

Next time the men returned, the same voice that seemed to do all the talking said: “. . . Expensive, of course, but she hates the idea of a registry-office.” They paused, and the listener heard that the other voice had said something to which the first replied: “No, not Grundy. But she had some friends cooked at one, and they said it was stuffy, and they would sooner have endured twenty short homilies. . . .”

A wax vesta scratched, blazed, lighted another cigar, and the second voice said, “Oh—ah!” and both grew inaudible again.

Dr. Everett Gayler had just pronounced the Grand Duchess’s disease—they were an afflicted family—a disease his narrator couldn’t pronounce at all. Most of her bones, in a state of necrosis, had been skilfully removed by the time the smokers had passed back. But so much more was Dr. Conrad listening to what the waves said to the shingle and the shingle answered back, than to either the Grand Duchess or the registry-office, that it never crossed his mind whose the voice was who lit the vesta. He heard it say good-night—its owner would get back to the hotel—and the other make due response. And then nothing was left but the coastguard.

But the Grand Duke’s family were not quite done with. It had to be recorded how many of his distinguished ancestors had suffered from *Plica polonica*. Still, the end did come at last, and the worthy lady thought perhaps if she could lie down now she might drop off. So Mrs. Iggulden got her release and slept.

Dr. Conrad didn’t, not a wink. The whole place was full of Sally. The flashlight at intervals, in couplets, seemed to say “Sally” twice when it came, and then to leave a blank for him to think about her in. The great slow steamer far out to sea showed a green eye of jealousy or a red one of anger because it

could not come ashore where Sally was, but had perforce to go on wherever it was navigated. The millions of black sea-elves—did you ever discriminate them?—that the slight observer fancies are the interstices of the moonlight on the water, were all busy about Sally, though it was hard to follow their movements. And every time St. Sennan said what o'clock it was, he added, "One hour nearer to Sally to-morrow!"

Poor Prosy!

## CHAPTER XXIX

BUT it never occurred to Dr. Vereker that the voice of the smoking gentleman, whose "*she*" knew a couple that had been cooked at a registry-office, was a voice quite familiar to him. The only effect it had on his Sally-dazed mind was to make him wonder four hours after what it was that kept putting Julius Bradshaw into his head. If a brain-molecule could have been found not preoccupied with Sally he might have been able to give her next day a suggestive hint about a possibility ahead. But never a word said he to Sally; and when, on her return from bathing the following morning, Mrs. Lobjoit, the fisherman's wife, surprised her with the news that "the young lady" had come and had left her luggage, but would be back in half an hour, she was first taken aback, and thought it was a mistake next. But no—no chance of that! The young lady had asked for Mrs. Algernon Fenwick, or, in default, for Miss Sally, quite distinctly. She hadn't said any name, but there was a gentleman with her. Mrs. Lobjoit seemed to imply that had there been no gentleman she might have been nameless. Padlock's omnibus they came in.

So Sally went on being taken aback where she had left off, and was still pondering over the phenomenon when her mother followed her through the little yard paved with round flints bedded in mortar—all except the flower-beds, which were in this case marigold-beds and fuchsia-beds and tamarisk-shakedown— and the street door which always stood open, and it was very little use ringing, the bell being broken. But you could pass through, and there would always be old Mr. Lobjoit in the kitchen, even if Mrs. Lobjoit was not there herself.

"Why not look on the boxes, you stupid kitten? There's a name on them, or ought to be." Thus Rosalind, after facts told.

"What a thing it is to have a practical maternal parent!"



Thus Sally. And Mrs. Lobjoit put on record with an amiable smile that that is what she kept saying to Miss Nightingale, "Why not look?" Whereas the fact is Mrs. Lobjoit never said anything of the sort.

"Here's a go!" says Sally, who gets at the label-side of the trunk first. "If it isn't Tishy!" And the mother and daughter look at each other's faces, each watching the other's theory forming of what this sudden apparition means.

"What do you think, mother?"

"What do *you* think, kitten?" But the truth is, both wanted time to know what to think. And they hadn't got much forwarder with the solution of the problem when a light was thrown upon it by the sudden apparition of Lætitia herself, accompanied by the young gentleman whom Sally did not scruple to speak of—but not in his presence—as her counter-jumper. She did this, she said, to "pay Tishy out" for what she had said about him before she made his acquaintance.

The couple were in a mixed state of exaltation and confusion—Tishy half laughing, a third crying, and a sixth keeping up her dignity. Both were saying might they come in, and doing it without waiting for an answer.

Rosalind's remark was one of those nonsequences often met with in real life: "There's enough lunch—or we can send out." Sally's was: "But are you the Julius Bradshaws, or are you not? That's what *I* want to know." Sally won't be trifled with, not she!

"Well, Sally dear, no,—we're not—not just yet." Tishy hesitates. Julius shows firmness.

"But we want to be at two o'clock this afternoon, if you'll come. . . ."

"Both of us?"

"Why—of course, both of you."

"Then Mrs. Lobjoit will have to be in time with lunch." It does not really matter who were the speakers, nor what the share of each was in the following aggregate:

"How did you manage to get it arranged?" "Why *now*? Have you quarrelled with your mother?" "How long can you be away? I hate a stingy honeymoon!" "You've got no things." "Do you think they'll know at home where you are?" "Where are you going afterwards?" "What do you think your father will say?" "What I want to know is, what put it into your head *now*, more than any other time?"

Responses to the whole of which, much at random, are incorporated in what follows : "Julius isn't wanted for three weeks." "I'm sure the Professor's on our side, really." "I left a letter to tell them, anyhow." "Calais. We shan't be sick, in weather like this. We'll cross by the night boat." "I've got a new dress to be married in, and a new umbrella—oh yes, and other things." "I'll tell you the whole story, Sally dear, as soon as I've had time to turn round." "No—not quarrelled—at least, no more than usual." "Special licence, of course."

What time Vereker, who had been to the post-office, which sold all sorts of things, to enquire if they had a packet of chemical oatmeal (the only thing his mother could digest this morning), and was coming back baffled, called in on his way to Mrs. Iggulden's. Not to see Sally, but only to take counsel with the family about chemical oatmeal. By a curious coincidence, the moment he heard of Miss Sales Wilson's arrival, he used Sally's expression, and said that there was "a go!" Perhaps there was, and that accounted for it.

"Here's Dr. Conrad—he'll have to come too." Thus Sally explicitly. To which he replied, "All right. Where?" Sally replied with gravity : "To see these two married by special licence." And Julius added : "You *must* come, doctor, to be my bottle-holder."

A small undercurrent of thought in the doctor's mind, in which he can still accommodate passing events and the world's trivialities, begins to receive impressions of the facts of the case. The great river called Sally flows steadily on, on its own account, and makes and meddles not. It despises other folk's petty affairs. Dr. Conrad masters the position, and goes on to draw inferences.

"Then that must have been *you* last night, Bradshaw?"

"I dare say it was. When?"

"Walking up and down with another fellow in front here. Smoking cigars, both of you."

"Why didn't you sing out?"

"Well, now—why didn't I?" He seems a little unable to account for himself, and no wonder. "I think I recollected it was like you after you had gone."

"Don't be a brain-case, Dr. Conrad. What would your patients say if they heard you go on like that?" Sally said this, of course. Her mother thought to herself that perhaps the patients would send for a married doctor.

But her mind was taking no strong hold on the current of events, considering what a very vital human interest was afloat on them. It was wandering back to another wedding-day—her own first wedding-day of twenty years ago. As she looked at this bridegroom—all his upspring of hope making light of such fears as needs must be in like case all the world over—he brought back to her vividly, for all he was so unlike him, the face of the much younger man who had met her that day at Umballa, whose utter freedom from suspicion as he welcomed her almost made her able to forget the weeks gone by—the more so that they were like a dream in Hell, and their sequel like an awakening in Paradise. Well, at any rate, she had recaptured this man from Chaos, and he was hers again. And she had Sally. But at the word the whole world reeled and her feet were on quicksands. What and whence was Sally ?

At least this was true—there was no taint of her father there ! Sally wasn't an angel—not a bit of it—no such embarrassment to a merely human family. But her mother could see her truth, honour, purity—call it what you will—in every feature, every movement. As she stood there, giving injunctions to Vereker to look alive or he'd be late, her huge coil of sea-soaked black hair making her white neck look whiter, and her white hands re-establishing hair-pins in the depths of it, she seemed the very incarnation of non-inheritance. Not a trace of the sire her mother shuddered to think of in the music of her voice, in the laughter all who knew her felt in the mirth of her eyebrows and the sparkle of her pearly teeth. All her identity was her own. If only it could have been known then that she was going to be Sally ! . . . But how fruitless all speculation was !

“Perhaps mother knows. Chemical oatmeal, mother, for invalids and persons of delicate digestion ? They haven't got it at Pemberton's.” The eyes and the teeth flash round on her mother, and in a twinkling the unhallowed shadow of the past is gone. It was only a moment in all, though it takes more to record it. Rosalind came back to the life of the present, but she knew nothing about chemical oatmeal. Never mind. The doctor would find out. And he would be sure to be in time.

He was in time—plenty of time, said public opinion. And the couple were duly married, and went away in Padlock's omnibus to catch the train for Dover in time for the boat. And Dr. Conrad's eyes were on the eldest bridesmaid. For, after all, two others were obtained—jury-bridesmaids they might be



called—in the persons of Miss Gwendolen Arkwright and an even smaller sister, who were somehow commandeered by Sally's enterprise, and bribed with promises of refreshment. But the smaller sister was an erring sister, for having been told she was on no account to speak during the service, she was suddenly struck with the unfairness of the whole thing, and, pointing at St. Sennans' arch-priest, said very audibly that *he* was "peatin'," so why wasn't she to "peat"? However, it was a very good wedding, and there was no doubt the principals had really become the Julius Bradshaws. They started from Dover on a sea that looked like a mill-pond; but Tishy's husband afterwards reported that the bride sat with her eyes shut the last half of the *trajet*, and said, "Don't speak to me, and I shall be all right."

That summer night Rosalind and her daughter were looking out over the reputed mill-pond at the silver dazzle with the elves in it. The moon had come to the scratch later than last night, from a feeling of what was due to the almanac, which may (or must) account for an otherwise enigmatical remark of Sally's, who, when her mother wondered what time it was, replied: "I don't know—it's later than it was yesterday." But did that matter, when it was the sort of night you stopped out all night on, according to Sally? They came to an anchor on a seat facing the sea, and adjourned human obligation *sine die*.

"I wonder if they've done wisely." Rosalind represents married thoughtfulness.

Sally shelves misgivings of this sort by reflections on the common lot of humanity, and considers that it will be the same for them as every one else.

"*They* 'll be all right," she says, with cheerful optimism. "I wonder what's become of Prosy."

"He's up there with his mother. I saw him at the window. But I didn't mean that: they'll be happy enough together, I've no doubt. I mean, has Lætitia done wisely to quarrel with her family?"

"She hasn't; it's only the she-dragon. Tishy told me all about it going to church."

And, oh dear, how poor Prosy, who was up there with his mother, did long to come out to the voices he could hear plain enough, even as far off as that! But then, he had been so long

away to-day, and he knew his excellent parent always liked to finish the tale of her own wedding-day when she began it—as she often did. So he listened again to the story of the wedding, which was celebrated in the severest thunderstorm experienced in these islands since the days of Queen Elizabeth, by a heroic clergyman who was suffering from pleuro-pneumonia, which made his voice inaudible till a miraculous chance produced one of Squilby's cough lozenges (which are not to be had now for love or money), and cured him on the spot. And how the bridesmaids all had mumps, more or less. And much concerning the amazingly dignified appearance of her own father and mother, which was proverbial, and therefore no matter of surprise to anyone, the proverb being no doubt well known to Europe.

But there, it didn't matter ! Sally would be there to-morrow.

## CHAPTER XXX

SALLY to-morrow—and to-morrow—and to-morrow. Sally for fourteen morrows. And the moon that had lighted the devoted young man to his fate—whatever it was to be—had waned and left the sky clear for a new one, on no account to be seen through glass.

They were morrows of inextinguishable, indescribable delight for their victims or victim—for how shall we classify Sally? Who shall tread the inner temple of a girl's mind? How shall it be known that she herself has the key to the Holy of Holies?—that she is not dwelling in the outer court, unconscious of her function of priestess, its privileges and responsibilities? Or, in plainer language, metaphors having been blowed in obedience to a probable wish of the reader's, how do we know Sally was not falling in love with the doctor? How do we know she was not in love with him already? How did *she* know?

All we know is that the morrows went on, each one sweeter than the last, and all the little incidents went on that were such nothings at the time, but were so sure to be borne in mind for ever? *You* know all about it, you who read. Like enough you can remember now, old as you are, how you and she (or he, according as your sex is) got lost in the wood, and never found where the picnic had come to an anchor till all the wings of chicken were gone and only legs left; or how there was a bull somewhere; or how next day the cat got caught on the shoulder of one of you and had to be detached, hooking horribly, by the other; or how you felt hurt (not jealous, but hurt) because she (or he) was decently civil to some new he (or she), and how relieved you were when you heard it was Mr. or Mrs. Some-name-you've-forgotten. Why, if you were to ask now, of that grey man or woman whose life was linked with yours, maybe now sixty years ago, did he or she have a drumstick, or go on to ham-sandwiches?—or, was it really a bull, after all?—or, had that



cat's claws passed out of memory ?—or, what was the name of that lady (or gentleman) at the So-and-so's ?—if you asked any of these things, she or he might want a repeat into a deaf ear, but would answer clear enough in the end, and recall the drumsticks and the equivocal bull, the cat's claws, and the unequivocal married person. And then you would turn over all the little things of old, and wrangle a bit over details here and there ; and all the while you would be the very self-same two that were young and were lost in the wood and trampled down the fern and saw the squirrels overhead all those long years ago.

Many a little thing of a like nature—perhaps some identical—made up hours that became days in that fortnight we have to skip, and then the end was drawing near ; and Dr. Conrad would have to go back and write prescriptions with nothing that could possibly do any harm in them, and abstain with difficulty from telling young ladies with cultivated waists they were liars when they said you could get a loaf of bread between all round, and it was sheer nonsense. And other little enjoyments of a G.P.'s life. Yes, the end was very near. But Sally's resolute optimism thrust regrets for the coming chill aside, and decided to be jolly while we could, and acted up to its decision.

Besides, an exciting variation gave an interest to the last week of the doctor's stay at St. Sennans. The wandering honeymooners, in gratitude to that saint, proposed to pay him a visit on their way back to London. Perhaps they would stop a week. So the smallest possible accommodation worthy of the name was found for them over a brandyball and bull's-eye shop in a house that had no back rooms, being laid like a vertical plaster against the cliff behind, and having an exit on a flat roof where you might bask in the sun and see the bright red poppies growing in the chalk, and contribute your share towards a settlement of the vexed question of which are brigs. There wasn't another room to be had in the real St. Sennans, and it came to that or the hotel (which was beastly), and you might just as well be in London. Thus Sally, and settled the question.

And this is how it comes to pass that at the beginning of this chapter—which we have only just got to, after all this circumlocution !—Sally and one of the Julius Bradshaws were sitting talking on the beach in the shadow of a breakwater, while the other Julius Bradshaw (the original one) was being taken for a walk to the extremely white lighthouse three miles off, or nearly

five if you went by the road, by Dr. Conrad, who by this time knew all the walks in the neighbourhood exactly as well as Sally did, neither more nor less. And both knew them very well.

The tide had come up quite as far as it had contemplated, and seemed to have made up its mind this time not to go back in too great a hurry. It was so nice there on the beach, with Tishy and Sally and Miss Gwendolen Arkwright, the late bridesmaid, who was having an independent chat all to herself about the many glories of the pier-end, and the sights to be seen there by visitors for a penny. And it—we are speaking of the tide—had got a delightful tangle of floating weed (*Fucus vesiculosus*) and well-washed scraps of wood from long-forgotten wrecks—who knows?—and was turning it gently to and fro, and over and over, with intermittent musical caresses, against the shingle-bank, whose counter-music spoke to the sea of the ages it had toiled in vain to grind it down to sand. And the tide said, wait, we shall see. The day will come, it said, when not a pebble of you all but shall be scattered drifting sand, unless you have the luck to be carted up at a shilling a load by permission of the authorities, to be made into a concrete of a proper consistency according to the local by-laws. But the pebbles said, please, no; we will bide our time down here, and you shall have us for your own—play with us in the sun at the feet of these two ladies, or make the whirling shoals of us, beaten to madness, thunder back your voice when it shouts in the storm to the seaman's wife, who stops her ears in the dark night alone that she may not hear you heralding her husband's death. And the tide said very good; but a day would come when the pebbles would be sand, for all that. And even the authority would be gone, and the local by-laws. But it would sound upon some shore for ever. So it kept on saying. Probably it was mistaken.

This has nothing to do with our story except that it is approximately the substance of a statement made by Sally to Miss Arkwright, who was interested, and had been promised it all over again to-morrow. For the present she could talk about the pier and take her audience for granted.

“But was it that Kensington Gardens business that did the job?” asked Sally, in the shadow of the breakwater, getting the black hair dry after three-quarters of an hour in the sea; because caps, you know, are all nonsense as far as keeping water out goes. So Sally had to sit ever so long with it out to dry. And the very tiny pebbles you can almost see into stick to your hands, as you



know, and come off in your hair when you run them through it, and have to be combed out. At least, Sally's had. But she kept on running the pebbles through her still blue fingers for all that as she half lay, half sat by Tishy on the beach.

" 'Did the job ! ' " repeats the bride on her honeymoon with some indignation. " Sally dear, when will you learn to be more refined in your ways of speech ? I'm not a *précieuse*, but—' did the job ! ' Really, Sally ! . . . "

" Observe the effect of three weeks in France. The Julius Bradshaws can parlay like anything ! No, Tishy darling, don't be a stuck-upper, but tell me again about Kensington Gardens. "

" I told you. It was just like that. Julius and I were walking up the avenue—you know. . . . "

" The one that goes up and across, and comes straight like this ? " Tishy, helped by a demonstration of blue finger-tips, recognises this, strange to say.

" No, not that one. It doesn't matter. We didn't see mamma coming till she was ever so close, because of the Speke Monument in the way. And what could possess her to come home that way from Hertford Street, Mayfair, I cannot imagine ! "

" Never mind, Tishy dear ! It's no use crying over spilled milk. What did she say ? "

" Nothing, dear. She turned purple, and bowed civilly. To Julius, of course. But it included me, whether or no. "

" But was that what did the job ? . . . We-ell, I do not see *anything* to object to in that expression. Was it ? "

" If you mean, dear, was it that that made us, me and Julius, feel that matters would get no better by waiting, I think perhaps it was. . . . Well, when it comes to meeting one's mother in Kensington Gardens, near the Speke Monument, and being bowed civilly to, it seems to me it's high time. . . . Now, isn't it, Sally ? "

Sally evaded giving testimony by raising other questions : " What did your father say ? " " Did the Dragon tell him about the meeting in the park ? " " What do you think he'll say now ? "

" Now ? Well, you know, I've got his letter. *He's* all right—and rather dear, *I* think. What do *you* think, Sally ? "

" I think very. "

" Perhaps I should say very. But with papa you never know. He really does love us all, after a fashion, except Egerton, only I'm never sure he doesn't do it to contradict mamma. "



“Why don’t they chuck each other and have done with it?” The vulgar child lets fly straight into the bull’s-eye; then adds thoughtfully: “*I* should, only, then, I’m not a married couple.”

Tishy elided the absurd figure of speech and ignored it. The chance of patronising was not to be lost.

“You are not married, dear. When you are, you may feel things differently. But, of course, papa and mamma *are* very odd. I used to hear them through my door between the rooms at L.B.G. Road. It was wrangle, wrangle, wrangle; fight, fight fight; all through the night—till two o’clock sometimes. Oh dear!”

“You’re sure they always were quarrelling?”

“Oh dear, yes. I used to catch all the regular words—settlement and principal and prevaricate. All that sort of thing, you know. But there they are, and there they’ll be ten years hence, that’s my belief, living together, sleeping together, and dining at opposite ends of the same table, and never communicating in the daytime except through me or Theeny, but quarrelling like cat and dog.”

“What shall you do when you go back? Go straight there?”

“I think so. Julius thinks so. After all, papa’s the master of the house—legally, at any rate.”

“Shall you write and say you’re coming?”

“Oh, no! Just go and take our chance. We shan’t be any nearer if we give mamma an opportunity of miffing away somewhere when we come. What *is* that little maid talking about there?” The ex-bridesmaid is three or four yards away, and is discoursing eloquently, a word in the above conversation having reminded her of a tragic event she has mentioned before in this story. “I seeps with my bid sister Totey’s dolly,” is what she appears to be saying.

“Never mind the little poppet, Tishy, till you’ve told me more about it.” Sally is full of curiosity. “Did that do the job or did it not? That’s what I want to know.”

“I suppose it did, dear, indirectly. That was on Saturday afternoon. Next morning we breakfasted under a thundercloud with Egerton grinning inside his skin, and looking like ‘Won’t you catch it, that’s all!’ at me out of the corner of his eye. That was bad enough, without one’s married sister up from the country taking one aside to say that *she* wasn’t going to interfere, and calling one to witness that *she* had said nothing so far. All she said was, ‘Me and mamma settle it between us.’ ‘Settle what?’

said I; and she didn't answer, and went away to the first celebration."

"She's not bad, your married sister," Sally decided thoughtfully.

"Oh no, Clarissa's not bad. Only she wants to run with the hare and explain to the hounds when they come up. . . . What happened next? Why, as I went upstairs past papa's room, out comes mamma scarlet with anger, and restraining herself in the most offensive way for me to go past. I took no notice, and when she was gone I went down and walked straight into the library. I said, 'What is it, papa?' I saw he was chuckling internally, as if he'd made a hit."

"Wasn't he angry? What did he say?"

"Oh no, *he* wasn't angry. Let's see . . . oh! . . . what he said was, 'That depends so entirely on what *it* is, my dear. But, broadly speaking, I should say it was your mother.' 'What has she been saying to you?' I asked. And he answered, 'I can only give her exact words without pledging myself to their meaning. She stated that she "supposed I was going to tell my daughter I approved of her walking about Kensington Gardens with *that man's* arm round her waist." I replied—reasonably, as it seems to me—that I supposed that man was there himself. Otherwise, it certainly did seem to me a most objectionable arrangement, and I hope you'll promise your mother not to do it again.'"

"What on earth did he mean?"

"You don't understand papa. He quibbles to irritate mamma. He meant like a waistband—separate—don't you see?"

"I see. But it wouldn't bend right." Sally's truthful nature postpones laughing at the Professor's absurdity; looks at the case on its merits. When she has done justice to this point, she laughs and adds: "What did *you* say, Tishy?"

"Oh, I said what nonsense, and it wasn't tight round like all that; only a symptom. And we didn't even know mamma was there because of Speke and Grant's obelisk. There wasn't a soul! Papa saw it quite as I did, and was most reasonable. So I thought I would feel my way to developing an idea we had been broaching, Julius and I, just that very time by the obelisk. I asked papa flatly what he would do if I married Julius straight off. 'I believe, my dear,' said he, 'that I should be bound to disapprove most highly of your conduct and his.' 'But *should* you, papa,' I said. 'I should be *bound* to, my dear,' said he. 'But *should* you turn us out of the house?' I asked. 'Most

certainly *not*,' said he emphatically. 'But I should disapprove.' I said I should be awfully sorry for that. 'Of course you would,' said he. 'Any dutiful daughter would. But I don't exactly see what harm it would do *you*.' And you see how his letter begins—that he is bound, as a parent, to feel the strongest disapprobation, and so on. No, I don't think we need be frightened of papa. As for mamma, of course it wouldn't be reasonable to expect her to . . ."

"To expect her to what?"

"Well, I was going to say keep her hair on. The expression is Egerton's, and I'm sorry to say his expressions are not always ladylike, however telling they are! So I hesitated. Now what is that baby talking about down there?"

For through the whole of Tishy's interesting tale that baby had been dwelling on the shocking occurrence of her sister's doll as before recorded. Her powers of narrative—giving a dramatic form to all things, and stimulated by Sally's statements of what the beach said to the sea, and the sea said back—had, it seemed, attracted shoals of fish from the ocean depths to hear her recital of the tragedy.

"Suppose, now, you come and tell it us up here, Gwenny," says the bride to the bridesmaid. And Sally adds: "Yes, delicious little Miss Arkwright, come and tell us all about it too." Whereupon Miss Arkwright's musical tones are suddenly silent, and her eyes, that are so nearly the colour of the sea behind her, remain fixed on her two petitioners, their owner not seeming quite sure whether she shall acquiesce, or coquette, or possibly even burst into tears. She decides, however, on compliance, coming suddenly up the beach on all fours, and exclaiming, "Tate me!" flings herself bodily on Sally, who welcomes her with, "You sweet little darling!" while Mrs. Julius Bradshaw, anticipating requisition, looks in her bag for another chocolate. They will spoil that child between them.

"Now tell us about the fisses and dolly," says Sally. But the narrator, all the artist rising in her soul, will have everything in order.

"I *told* ze fisses," she says, reproach in her voice.

"I see, ducky. You told the fishes, and now you'll tell us all about dolly."

"I seeps wiv dolly, because my bid sister Totey said 'Yes.' Dolly seeps in her fings. I seep in my nightgown. Kean from the wass——"



"How nice you must be! Well, then, what next?" Sally may be said to imbibe the narrator at intervals. Tishy calls her a selfish girl. "You've got her all to yourself," she says. The story goes on:

"I seep vethy thound. Papa seeps vethy thound. Dolly got between the theets and the blangticks, and came out. It was a dood dob. Dane *said* it *was*—a dood dob!"

"What did Jane say was a good job? Poor dolly coming out?" A long, grave headshake denies this. The constructive difficulties of the tale are beyond the young narrator's skill. She has to resort to ellipsis.

"Or I sood have been all over brang and sawduss. Dane *said* so."

"Don't you see, Sally," says Tishy, "dolly was in another compartment—the other side of the sheet." But Sally says, of course, *she* understands, perhaps even suspects Tishy of claiming more acquaintance with children than herself because she has been married three weeks. This isn't fair patronising.

"Dolly came out at ve stisses"—so the sad tale goes on—"and tyed, dolly did. Dane put her head on to ty wiv my pocket-hanshtiff!"

"I see, you little ducky, of course her head had come off, and she couldn't cry till it was put on, was that it? Don't dance, but say yes or no." This referred to a seated triumphal dance the chronicler indulged in at having put so much safely on record. Having subsided, she decided on *zass* as the proper thing to say, but it took time. Then she added suddenly: "But I *told* ze fisses." Sally took a good long draught, and said: "Of course you did, darling. You shan't be done out of that!" But an addendum or appendix was forthcoming.

"My mummar says I must tate dolly to be socked for a penny where the man is wiv buttons—and the man let Totey look froo his pyglass, and see all ve long sips, sits miles long—and I shall see when I'm a glowed-up little girl, like Totey."

"Coastguard's telescope, evidently," says Sally. "The man up at the flagstaff. Six miles long is how far off they were, not the length of the ships at all."

"I saw that. But what on earth were the socks? Does his wife sell doll's clothes?"

"We must try to find that out." And Sally sets herself to the task. But it's none so easy. Some mystery shrouds the approach to this passage in dolly's future life. It is connected

with "kymin up," and "tandin' on a tep," and when it began it went wizzy, wizzy, wizz, and e-e-e-e, and never stopped. But Gwendolen had not been alarmed whatever it was, because her "puppar" was there. But it was exhausting to the intellect to tell of, for the description ended with a musical, if vacuous, laugh, and a plunge into Sally's bosom, where the narrator remained chuckling, but quite welcome.

"So Gwenny wasn't pitened! What a courageous little poppet! I wonder what on earth it was, Sally."

Thus Tishy, at a loss. But Sally is sharper, for in a moment the solution dawns upon her.

"What a couple of fools we are, Tishy dear! It wasn't *socks*—it was *shocks*. It was the galvanic battery at the end of the pier. A penny a time, and you mustn't have it on full up, or you howl. Why on earth didn't we think of that before?"

But Nurse Jane comes in on the top of the laughter that follows, which Miss Gwendolen is joining in, rather claiming it as a triumph for her own dramatic power. She demurs to removal, but goes in the end on condition that all present shall come and see dolly galvanised at an early date. Jane agrees to replace dolly's vitals and sew her up to qualify her for this experience. And so they depart.

"What a dear little mite!" says Mrs. Julius; and then they let the mite lapse, and go back to the previous question.

"No, Sally dear, mamma will be mamma to the end of the time. But I didn't tell you all papa said, did I?"

"How on earth can *I* tell, Tishy dear? You had got to 'any dutiful daughter would,' etcetera. Cut along! Comes of being in love, I suppose." This last is a reflection on the low state of Tishy's reasoning powers.

"Well, just after that, when I was going to kiss him and go, papa stopped me, and said he had something to say, only he mustn't be too long because he had to finish a paper on, I think, 'Some Technical Terms in use in Cnidos in the Sixth Century, B.C.' Or was it . . . ?"

"That was it. That one'll do beautifully. Go ahead!"

"Well—of course it doesn't matter. It was like papa, anyhow. . . . Oh, yes—what he said then! It was about Aunt Priscilla's thousand pounds. He wanted to repeat that the interest would be paid to me half-yearly if by chance I married Julius or any other man without his consent. 'I wish it to be distinctly understood that if you marry Bradshaw it will be

against my consent. But I only ask you to promise me this, Lætitia, that you won't marry any other man against my consent at present.' I promised, and he said I was a dutiful daughter. There won't be any trouble with papa."

"Don't look like it! I say, Tishy, that thousand pounds is very nice. How much will you have? Forty pounds a year?"

"It's more than that. It's gone up, somehow—sums of money do—or down. They're never the same as at first. I'm so glad about it. It's not as if I brought Julius absolutely nothing."

"How much is it?" Sally is under the impression that sums of money that exist on the word of signed documents only, and whose materialisation can only be witnessed by bankers, are like fourpence, one of whose properties is that it *is* fourpence. They are not analogous, and Lætitia is being initiated into the higher knowledge.

"Well, dear, you see the stock has gone up, and it's at six three-quarters. You must ask Julius. He can do the arithmetic."

"Does that mean it's sixty-seven pounds ten?"

"You'd better ask Julius. Then, you know, there's the interest." Sally asked what interest. "Why, you see, Aunt Priscilla left it to me eleven years ago, so there's more." But a vendor of mauve and magenta woollen goods, known to Sally as "the beach-woman," was working up towards them.

"That woman never goes when she comes," said Sally. "Let's get up and go!"

We like lingering over this pleasant little time. It helps on but little, if at all, with our story. But in years to come this young couple, who only slip into it by a side-chance, having really little more to do with it than any of the thousand and one collaterals that interest the lives of all of us, and come and go and are forgotten—this Julius and Lætitia will talk of the pleasant three days or so they had at St. Sennans when they came back from France. And we, too, having choice of how much we shall tell of those three or four days, are in little haste to leave them. Those hours of unblushing idleness under a glorious sun—idleness fostered and encouraged until it seems one great exertion to call a fly, and another to subside into it—idleness on matchless moonlight nights, on land or on water—idleness with an affectation of astronomical study, just up to speculating on the identity of Aldebaran or Arcturus, but scarcely equal to metaphysics—



idleness that lends itself readily to turning tables and automatic writing, and gets some convincing phenomena, and finds out that so-and-so is an extraordinary medium—idleness that says that letter will do just as well to-morrow, and Smith must wait—such hours as these disintegrate the moral fibre and anæsthetize our sense of responsibility, and make us so oblivious of musical criticism that we accept brass bands and inexplicable serenaders, white or black, and even accordions and hurdy-gurdies, as intrinsic features of the *ensemble*—the *fengshui* of the time and place—and give them a penny if we've got one.

That is and will be Mr. and Mrs. Julius Bradshaw's memory of those three days or so, when they have grown quite old together, as we hope they may. And if you add memory of an intoxicated delirium of love—of love that was on no account to be shown or declared or even hinted at—and of a tiresome hitch or qualification, an unselfish parent in full blow, you will have the record that is to remain in the mind of Conrad Vereker.

## CHAPTER XXXI

THAT evening Sally sat with her mother on the very uncomfortable seat they affected on what was known as the Parade, a stone's throw from the house for a good stone-thrower. It had a little platform of pebbles to stand on, and tamarisks to tickle you from behind when the wind was northerly. It was a corrugated and painful seat, and had a strange power of finding out your tender vertebræ and pulverising them, whatever your stature might be. It fell forward when its occupants, goaded to madness, bore too hard on its front bar, and convinced them they would do well, henceforward, to hold it artificially in its place. But Rosalind and her daughter forgave it all these defects—perhaps because they were really too lazy to protest even against torture. It was the sea air. Anyhow, there they sat that evening, waiting for Padlock's omnibus to come, bringing Fenwick from the station. Just at the moment at which the story overtakes them, Rosalind was looking wonderfully handsome in the sunset light, and Sally was thinking to herself what a beautiful mother she had ; and how, when the after-glow dies, it will leave its memory in the red gold that is somewhere in the rich brown her eyes are resting on. Sally was fond of dwelling on her mother's beauty. Perhaps doing so satisfied her personal vanity by deputy. She was content with her own self, but had no admiration for it.

"You *are* a dear good mammy. Fancy your losing all the best time of the morning indoors !"

"How the best time of the morning, chick ?"

"Sitting with that old cat upstairs. . . . Well, I can't help it. She *is* an old cat."

"You're a perverse little monkey, kitten ; that's what *you* are !" Rosalind laughed with an excuse—or caress, it may be—in her laugh. "No," she continued, "we are much too hard on that old lady, both of us. Do you know, to-day she was quite

entertaining—told me all about her own wedding-day, and how all the bridesmaids had the mumps.”

“Has she never told you that before?”

“Only once. Then she told me about the late-lamented, and what a respect he had for her judgment, and how he referred to her at every crisis. I didn’t think her at all bad company.”

“Because you’re a darling. I suppose you had it all about how Prosy, when he was a boy, wanted to study music, and how his pa said that the turning-point in the career of youth lay in the choice of a profession.”

“Oh yes! And how his strong musical turn came from her side of the family. In herself it was dormant. But her Aunt Sophia had never once put her finger on a false note of the piano. This was confirmed by the authority of her eminent uncle, Dr. Everett Gayler, himself no mean musician.”

“Poor Prosy! I know.”

“And how musical faculty—amounting to genius—often remained absolutely unsuspected owing to its possessor having no inheritance. But it would come out in the children. Then, and not till then, tardy justice was done. . . . Well, I don’t know exactly how she worked it out, but she managed to suggest that she was Handel and Mozart in abeyance. Her son’s fair complexion clinched matters. It was the true prototype of her own. A thoroughly musical complexion, bespeaking German ancestry.”

“Isn’t that the omnibus?” says Sally. But, no, it isn’t. She continues: “I don’t believe in musical complexions. Look at Julius Bradshaw—dark, with high cheek-bones, and a thin olive hand with blue veins in it. I say, mother. . . .”

“What, chick?”

“He’s changed his identity—Julius Bradshaw has. I can’t believe he was that spooney boy that used to come hankering after me at church.” And the amusement this memory makes hangs about Sally’s lips as the two sit on into a pause of silence.

The face of her mother does not catch the amusement, but remains grave and thoughtful. She does not speak; but the handsome eyes that rest so lovingly on the speaker are full of something from the past—some record that it would be an utter bewilderment to Sally to read—a bewilderment far beyond that crux of the moment which maybe has struck her young mind for the first time—the old familiar puzzle of the change that comes to all of us in our transition from first to last ex-



perience of the strange phenomenon we call a friend. Sally can't make it out—the way a silly lad, love-struck about her indifferent self so short a while back, has become a totally altered person, the husband of her schoolmate, an actual identity of life and thought and feeling; he who was in those early days little more than a suit of clothes and a new prayer-book.

But if that is so strange to Sally, how measurelessly stranger is she herself to her mother beside her! And the man they are waiting and watching for, who is somewhere between this and St. Egbert's station in Padlock's venerable 'bus, what a crux is *he*, compared now to that intoxicated young lover of two-and-twenty years ago, in that lawn-tennis garden that has passed so utterly from his memory! And a moment's doubt, "But—has it?" is caught and absorbed by what seemed to Rosalind now an almost absurd fact—that, a week before, he had been nothing but a *fidus Achates* of that other young man provided to make up the lawn-tennis set, and that it was that other young man at first, not he, that belonged to *her*. And he had changed away so easily to—who was it? Jessie Nairn, to be sure—and left the coast clear for his friend. Whatever now *was* his name? Oh dear, what a fool was Rosalind! said she to herself, to have half let slip that it was *he* that was Fenwick, and not Gerry at all. All this compares itself with Sally's experience of Bradshaw's metamorphosis, and her own seems the stranger.

Then a moment of sharp pain that she cannot talk to Sally of these things, but must lead a secret life in her own silent heart. And then she comes back into the living world, and finds Sally well on with the development of another topic.

"Of course, poor dears! They've not played a note together since the row. It's been nothing but Kensington Gardens or the Albert Hall. But I'm afraid he's no better. If only he *could* be, it would make all the difference."

"What's that, darling? *Who* could be...? Not your father?" For, as often as not, Rosalind would speak of her husband as Sally's father.

"Not Jeremiah—no. I was talking about Julius B. and his nervous system. Wouldn't it?"

"Wouldn't it what?"

"Make all the difference?" I mean that he could get his violin-playing back. I told you about that letter?"

"No—what letter?"

"From an agent in Paris. Rateau, I think, was the name.

Had heard Signor Carissimi had recovered his health completely, and was playing. Hoped he might be honoured with his instructions to make his arrangements in Paris, as he had done so four years ago. Wasn't it aggravating?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"Why, of course it does, mother darling. The aggravation! Just think now! Suppose he could rely on ten pounds a night, fancy that!"

"Suppose he could!... Yes, that would be nice." But there is a preoccupation in her tone, and Sally wants sympathy to be drawn with a vigorous outline.

"What's my maternal parent thinking about, as grave as a judge? Jeremiah's all right, mammy darling! *He's* not killed in a railway accident. Catch *him*!" This is part of a systematized relationship between the two. Each always discredits the possibility of mishap to the other. It might be described as chronic reciprocal Christian Science.

"I wasn't thinking of Gerry." Which is true in a sense, as she does not think of the Gerry her daughter knows. And the partial untruth does not cross her mind—a tacit recognition of the powers of change. "I was wool-gathering."

"No—what *was* she thinking of?" For some reason the third person is thought more persuasive than the second.

"Thinking of her kitten." And this is true enough, as Rosalind is really always thinking of Sally, more or less.

"We-ell, *I'm* all right. What's the matter with *me*?"

"Nothing at all that I know of, darling." But it does cross the speaker's mind that the context of circumstances might make this an opportunity for getting at some information she wants. For Sally has remained perfectly inscrutable about Conrad Vereker, and Rosalind has been asking herself whether it is possible that, after all, there *is* nothing. She doesn't know how to set about it, though. Perhaps the best thing would be to take a leaf out of Sally's own book, and go straight to the bull's-eye.

"Do you really want to know what I was thinking of, Sally-kin?" But no sooner has she formulated the intention of asking a question, and allowed the intention to creep into her voice than Sally knows all about it.

"As if I didn't know already. You mean me and Prosy."

"Of course. But how did you know?"

"Mammy *dear*! As if I was born yesterday! If you want



people not to know things, you mustn't have delicate inflexions of voice. I knew you were going to catechize about Prosy the minute you got to 'did I really want to know.' "

"But I'm not going to catechize, chick. Only when you ask me what I'm thinking about, and really want to know, I tell you. I *was* thinking about you and Conrad Vereker." For some mysterious reason this mention of his name in full seems to mature the conversation, and make clearer definition necessary.

Our own private opinion is that anyone who closely observes human communion will see that two-thirds of it runs on lines like the foregoing. Very rarely indeed does a human creature say what it means. Exhaustive definition, lucid statements, concise terminology—even plain English—are foreign to its nature. The congenial soil in which the fruit of Intelligence ripens is Suggestion, and the wireless telegraphs of the mind are the means by which it rejoices to communicate. Don't try to say what you mean—because *you* can't. You are not clever enough. Try to mean what you want to say, and leave the dictionary to take care of itself.

This little bit of philosophizing of ours has just given Sally time, pondering gravely with the eyebrows all at rest and lips at ease, to deal with the developed position created by the mere substitution of a name for a nickname.

"Ought there to be . . . anything to think about?" Thus Sally; and her mother sees, or thinks she sees, a little new colour in the girl's cheeks. Or is it only the sunset? Then Rosalind says to herself that perhaps she has made a mistake, had better have left it alone. Perhaps. But it's done now. She is not one that goes back on her resolutions. It is best not to be too tugging and solemn over it. She speaks with a laugh.

"It's not my little daughter I'm afraid of, Sallykin. She's got the key of the position. It's that dear good boy."

"He's not a boy. He's thirty-one next February. Only he's not got a birthday, because it's not leap-year. Going by birthdays he's not quite half-past seven."

"Then it won't do to go by birthdays. Even at thirty-one, though, some boys are not old enough to know better. He's very inexperienced in some things."

"A babe unborn—only he can write prescriptions. Only they don't do you any good. ("Ungrateful child!" . . . "Well, they *don't*.") You see, he hasn't anyone to go to to ask about things except me. Of course *I* can tell him, if you come to that!"



"There's his mother."

"His mother! That old dianthus! Oh, mammy darling, what different sorts of mothers do crop up when you think of it!" And Sally is so moved by this scientific marvel that she suddenly kisses her mother, there out on the public parade with a gentleman in check trousers and an eye-glass coming along!

"Why do you call the old lady a dianthus, chick? Really, the way you treat that poor old body!..."

"Not when Prosy's there. I know my place.... We-ell, you know what a dianthus's figure is like? When the tentacles are in, I mean."

But Rosalind tacitly condemns the analogy. Is she not herself a mother, and bound to take part with her kind, however obese? "What were you and the doctor talking about in the boat all that long time yesterday?" she asks, skipping an interval which might easily have contained a review of Mrs. Vereker inside-out like a sea-anemone. Sally is quite equal to it.

"Resuscitation after drowning. Prosy says death is really due to carbonic acid poisoning. Anybody would think it was choking, but it's nothing of the sort. The arterial blood is insufficiently fed with oxygen, and death ensues."

"How long did you talk about that?"

"Ever so long. Till I asked him what he should do if a visitor were drowned and couldn't be brought to. Not at the hotel; down here. Me, for instance."

"What did he say?"

"He was jolly solemn over it, Prosy was. Said he should try his best, and as soon as he was sure it was no go, put an end to his own existence. I said that would be wrong, and besides, he couldn't do it. He said, oh yes, he could—he could inject air into a vein, and lots of things. He went on a physiological tack, so I quoted Hamlet."

"What did he make of Hamlet?"

"Said the researches of modern science all tended to prove that extinction awaited us at death, and he would take his chance. He was quite serious over it."

"And then you said?..."

"I said, suppose it turned out that modern science was tommy-rot, wouldn't he feel like a fool when all was said and done? He admitted that he might, in that case. But he would take his chance, he said. And then we had a long argument, Prosy and I."

“Has he ever resuscitated a drowned person?”

“Oh yes, two or three. But he says he should like a little more practice, as it’s a very interesting subject.”

“You really are the most ridiculous little kitten there ever was! Talking like the President of the Royal College of Surgeons! Not a smile.”

“We-ell, there’s nothing in *that*.” Slightly offended dignity on Miss Sally’s part. “I say, the bus is very late; it’s striking seven.”

But just as St. Sennan ceases, and leaves the air clear for listening, Rosalind exclaims, “Isn’t that it?” And this time it is it, and by ten minutes past seven Fenwick is in the arms of his family, who congratulate him on a beautiful new suit of navy-blue serge, in which he looks very handsome.

Often now when she looks back to those days can Rosalind see before her the grave young face in the sundown, and hear the tale of Dr. Conrad’s materialism. And then she sees once more over the smooth purple sea of the day before the little boat sculled by Vereker, with Sally in the stern steering. And the white sails of the Grace Darling of St. Sennans, that had taken a large party out at sixpence each person three hours ago, and couldn’t get back by herself for want of wind, and had to be towed by a row-boat, whose oars sounded rhythmically across the mile of intervening water. She was doing nothing to help, was Grace, but her sails flopped a little now and again, just enough to show how glad she would have been to do so with a little encouragement. Rosalind can see it all again quite plain, and the little white creamy cloud that had taken pity on the doctor sculling in the boat, and made a cool island of shadow, coloured imperial purple on the sea, for him and Sally to float in, and talk of how some unknown person, fool enough to get drowned, should one day be recalled from the gate of Death.

## CHAPTER XXXII

FENWICK had been granted, or had appropriated, another week's holiday, and the wine-trade was to lose some of his valuable services during that time. Not all, because in these days you can do so much by telegraph. Consequently the chimney-piece with the rabbits made of shells on each side, and the model of the Dreadnought—with real planks and a companion-ladder that went too far down, and almost serviceable brass carronades ready for action—and a sampler by Mercy Lobjoit (1763), showing David much too small for the stitches he was composed of, and even Goliath not big enough to have two lips—this chimney-piece soon become a magazine of yellow telegrams, which blew away when the window and door were open at the same time.

It was on the second of Fenwick's days on this visit that an unusual storm of telegrams, as he came in to breakfast after an early dip in the sea, confirmed the statement in the paper of the evening before that W. and S.W. breezes might be expected later. "Wind freshening," was the phrase in which the forecast threw doubts on the permanency of its recent references to a smooth Channel-passage. However, faith had already been undermined by concurrent testimony to light easterly winds backing north, on the coast of Ireland. Sally was denouncing meteorology as imposture when the returning bather produced the effect recorded. It interrupted a question on his lips as he entered, and postponed it until the telegram papers had all been re-instated and the window closed, so that Mrs. Lobjoit might come in with the hot rolls and eggs and not have anything blown away. Then peace reigned and the question got asked.

"What are we going to do to-day?" said Sally, repeating it. "I know what I'm going to do first. I'm going to swim round the buoy."

"My dear, they'll never put the machines down to-day." This was her mother.



"They'll do it fast enough, if I tell 'em to. It's half the fun, having it a little rough."

"Well, kitten, I suppose you'll go your own way; only I shall be very glad when you're back in your machine. Coffee, Gerry?"

"Yes, coffee—in the big cup with the chip, and lots of milk. You're a dangerous young monkey, Sarah; and I shall get old Benjamin's boat, and hang about. And then you'll be happy, Rosey, eh?"

"No, I shan't! We shall have you getting capsized, too. (I put in three lumps of sugar. . . . No, *not* little ones—*big* ones!) What a thing it is to be connected with aquatic characters!"

"Never you mind the mother, Jeremiah. You get the boat. I should like it to dive off."

"All right, I'll get Vereker, and we'll row out. The doctor's not bad as an oarsman. Bradshaw doesn't make much of it. (Yes, thanks; another egg. The brown one preferred; don't know why!) Yes, I'll get Dr. Conrad, and you shall come and dive off."

All which was duly done, and Sally got into great disgrace by scrambling up into the boat with the help of a looped rope hung over the side, and was thereafter known to more than one decorous family group frequenting the beach as that bold Miss Nightingale. But what did Sally care what those stuffy people thought about her, with such a set-off against their bad opinion as the glorious plunge down into the depths, and the rushing sea-murmur in her ears, the only sound in the strange green silence; and then the sudden magic of the change back to the dazzling sun on the moving foam, and some human voice that was speaking when she dived only just ending off? Surely, after so long a plunge down, down, that voice should have passed on to some new topic.

For that black and shining merpussy, during one deep dive into the under-world of trackless waters, had had time to recollect an appointment with a friend, and had settled in her mind that, as soon as she was once more in upper air, she would mention it to the crew of the boat she had dived from. She was long enough under for that. Then up she came into the rise and fall and ripple overhead like a sudden Loreley, and as soon as she could see where the boat had got to, and was free of a long stem of floating weed she had caught up in the foam, she found her voice. And in it, as it rang out in the morning air, was a world

of youth and life and hope from which care was an outcast, flung to the winds and the waves.

"I say, Jeremiah, we've got to meet a friend of yours on the pier this afternoon."

"Time for you to come out of that water, Sarah." This name had become nearly invariable on Fenwick's part. "Who's your friend?"

"A young lady for you! She's going to bring her dolly to be electrified for a penny. She'll cry if we don't go; so will dolly."

"Then we *must* go, clearly. The doctor must come to see fair, or dolly may get electrocuted, like me." Fenwick very rarely spoke of his accident now; most likely would not have done so this time but for a motive akin to his wife's nettle-grasping. He knew Sally would think of it, and would not have her suppose he shirked speaking of it.

But the laugh goes for a moment out of the face down there in the water, and the pearls that glittered in the sun have vanished and the eyes are grave beneath their brows. Only for a moment; then all the Loreley is back in evidence again, and Sally is petitioning for only one more plunge, and then she really will swim in. The crew protests, but the Loreley has her way; her sort generally has.

"I always wonder," says Dr. Conrad, as they row to shore with studied slowness—one must, to keep down to the pace of the swiftest swimmer—"I always wonder whether they found that half-crown." Probably he, too, only says this to accentuate the not-necessarily-to-be-avoided character of the subject.

The reason Fenwick answered nothing, but remained thoughtfully silent, was, as Dr. Vereker perceived after he had spoken, that the half-crown was mere hearsay to him, and, as such, naturally enforced speculation on the strange "B.C." period of which he knew nothing. Time did but little to minimise the painful character of such speculations, although it seemed to make them less and less frequent. Vereker said no more, partly because he felt this, partly because he was so engrossed with the Loreley. He dropped the half-crown.

"You needn't row away yet," said the voice from the water. "The machines are miles off. Look here, I'm going to swim under the boat and come up on the other side!"

Said Fenwick: "You'll be drowned, Sarah, before you've done! Do consider your mother a little!"



Said the Loreley : " All right ! good-bye !" and disappeared. She was so long under that it was quite a relief when she reappeared, well off the boat's counter ; for, of course, there was some way on the boat, and Sally made none. The crew's eyes had been watching the wrong water over the beam.

" Didn't I do that nicely ? . . . ' Beautifully ? ' Yes, I should rather think I did ! Good-bye ; I must go to my machine ! They won't leave it down any longer."

Off went the swimmer in the highest spirits, and landed with some difficulty, so much had the south-west wind freshened ; and the machine started up the beach at a brisk canter to rejoin its many unused companions on their higher level.

Dr. Conrad, with the exhilaration of the Loreley in his heart, was to meet with a damper administered to him by his affectionate parent, who had improved immensely in the sea air, and was getting quite an appetite.

" There is nothing, my dear, that I detest more cordially than interference," said she, after accepting, rather more easily than usual, her son's apologies for coming in late to lunch, and also being distinctly gracious to Mrs. Iggulden about the beefsteak-pudding. " Your father disapproved of it, and the whole of my family. The words ' never meddle ' were on their lips from morning till night. Is it wonderful that I abstain from speaking, as I so often do ? Whatever I see, I am silent." And accordingly was for a few illustrative seconds.

But her son, conceiving that the pause was one very common in cases of incipient beefsteak-pudding, and really due to kidneys, made an autopsy of the centre of Mrs. Iggulden's masterpiece ; but when he had differentiated its contents and insulated kidneys beyond a doubt, he stood exposed and reproved by the tone in which his mother resumed :

" Not for me ; I have oceans. I shall never eat what I have, and it is so wasteful ! . . . No, my dear. You ask, ' What is it, then ? ' But I was going to tell you when you interrupted me." Here a pause for the Universe to settle down to attention. " There is always so much disturbance ; but my meaning is plain. When I was a girl young women were different. . . . I dare say it is all right. I do not wish to lay myself open to ridicule for my old-fashioned opinions. . . . What is it ? I came back early, certainly, because I found the sun so tiring ; but surely, my dear, you cannot have failed to see that our front



window commands a full view of the bathing-machines. But I am silent. . . . Mrs. Iggulden does not understand making mustard. Hers runs."

Dr. Conrad was not interested in the mustard. He *was* about the cryptic attack on Sally's swimming and diving, which he felt to have been dexterously conveyed in his parent's speech with scarcely a word really to the point. There was no lack of skill in the Goody's method. He flushed slightly, and made no immediate reply—even to a superhumanly meek, "I know I shall be told I am wrong"—until after he had complied with a requisition for a very little more—so small a quantity as to seem somehow to reduce the lady's previous total morally, though it added to it physically—and then he spoke, taking the indictment for granted :

"I can't see what you find fault with. Not Miss Sally's bathing-costume ; nobody could !" Which was truth itself, for nothing more elegant could have been found in the annals of bathing. "And if she has a boat to dive off, somebody must row it. Besides, her mother would object if. . . ." But the doctor is impatient and annoyed—a rare thing with him. He treats his beefsteak-pudding coldly, causing his mother to say : "Then you can ring the bell."

However, she did not intend her text to be spoiled by irruptions of Mrs. Iggulden, so she waited until the frequent rice-pudding had elapsed, and then resumed at an advantage :

"You were very snappish and peevish with me just now, Conrad, without waiting to hear what I had to say. But I overlook it. I am your mother. If you had waited, I should have told you that I have no fault whatever to find with Miss Nightingale's bathing-dress. It is, no doubt, strictly *en règle*. Nor can I say, in these days, what I think of girls practising exercises that in *my* day were thought unwomanly. All is changed now, and I am old-fashioned. But this I do say, that had your father, or your great-uncle, Dr. Everett Gayler, been told forty years ago that a time would come when it would be thought no disgrace for an *English girl* to jump off a boat with an *unmarried man* in it. . . . My dear, I am sure the latter would have made one of those acrid and biting remarks for which he was celebrated in his own circle, and which have even, I believe, been repeated by Royalty. That is the only thing I have to say. I say nothing of girls learning to swim and dive. I say nothing of their bicycling. Possibly the young lady

who passed the window this morning with a gentleman *on the same bicycle* was properly engaged to him; or his sister. Even about the practice of Sandow, or Japanese wrestling, I have nothing to say. But if they are to dive off boats in the open sea, in the face of all the beach, at least let the boats be rowed by married men. That is all I ask. It is very little."

What fools mothers sometimes are about their sons! They contrive that these sons shall pass through youth to early manhood without a suspicion that even mothers have human weaknesses. Then, all in a moment, just when love has ridden triumphant into the citadel of the boys' souls, they will sacrifice all—all they have won in a lifetime—to indulge some petty spleen against the new *régime* that threatens their dethronement. And there is no surer way of undermining a son's loyalty than to suggest a want of delicate feeling in the new Queen—nothing that can make him question the past so effectually as to force him to hold his nostrils in a smell of propriety, puffed into what seems to him a gale from heaven.

The contrast between the recent merpussy in the freshening seas, and this, as it seemed to him, perfectly gratuitous intrusion of moral carbolic acid, gave Dr. Conrad a sense of nausea, which his love for his mother enjoined ignorance of. His mind cast about, not for ways of excusing Sally—the idea!—but of white-washing his mother, without seeming to suggest that her own mind had anything Fescennine about it. This is always the great difficulty skywardness has in dealing with the moral scavenger. Are not the motives of purity unimpeachable?

Goody Vereker, however, did not suspect herself of being a fool. On the contrary, she felt highly satisfied with her speech, and may be said to have hugged its peroration. Her son flushed slightly and bit his lip, giving the old lady time for a corollary in a subdued and chastened voice.

"Had I been asked—had you consulted me, my dear—I should certainly have advised that Mr. Fenwick should have been accompanied by another married man, certainly not by a young, single gentleman. The man himself—I am referring to the owner of the boat—would have done quite well, whether married or single. Boatmen are seldom unmarried, though frequently tattooed with ladies' names when they have been in the navy. You see something to laugh at, Conrad? In your mother! But I am used to it." The doctor's smile was in memory of two sun-browned arms that had pushed the boat off



two hours ago. One had Elinor and Kate on it, the other Bessie and a Union Jack.

"Don't you think, mother dear," said the doctor at last, "that if Mrs. Fenwick, who knew all about it, had seen anything outrageous she would have spoken? She really only seemed anxious none of us should get drowned."

"Very likely, my dear; she would be. You will, I am sure, do me this justice, that I have throughout said, from the very beginning, that Mrs. Fenwick is a most excellent person, though I have sometimes found her tiring."

"I am sorry she has tired you. You must always tell her, you know, when you're tired, and then she'll come and fetch me." The doctor resisted a temptation to ask, "From the very beginning of *what*?" For the suggestion that materials for laceration were simmering was without foundation; was, in fact, only an example of the speaker's method. She followed it with another.

"It is so often the case with women who have passed a good deal of time in India."

"Are women tiring when they have passed a good deal of time in India?"

"My dear Conrad, *is it likely* I should talk such nonsense? You know perfectly well what I mean." But the doctor merely awaited natural development, which came. "Mind, I do not say I *believe* Mrs. Julius Bradshaw's story. But it would quite account for it—fully!"

What would account for what? Heaven only knew! However, the speaker was getting the bit in her teeth, and earth would know very soon. Dr. Conrad was conscious at this moment of the sensation which had once made Sally speak of his mamma as an Octopus. She threw out a tentacle.

"And, of course, Mrs. Julius Bradshaw's story may be nothing but idle talk. I am the last person to give credit to mere irresponsible gossip. Let us hope it is ill-founded."

Whereupon her son, who knew another tentacle would come and entangle him if he slipped clear from this one, surrendered at discretion. What *was* Mrs. Julius Bradshaw's story? A most uncandid way of putting it, for the fact was he had heard it all from Sally in the strictest confidence. So the insincerity was compulsory, in a sense.

The Octopus, who was by this time anchored in her knitting-chair, and awaiting her mixture—two tablespoonfuls after every



meal—closed her eyes to pursue the subject, but warmed to the chase visibly.

“Are you going to tell me, my dear Conrad, that you do *not* know that it has been said—I vouch for nothing, remember—that Miss Nightingale’s mother was divorced from her father twenty years ago in India?”

“I don’t think it’s any concern of yours or mine.” But having said this, he would have liked to recall it and substitute something else. It was brusque, and he was not sure that it was a fair way of stating the case, especially as this matter had been freely discussed between them in the days of their first acquaintance with Sally and her mother. Dr. Conrad felt mean for renegading from his apparent admission at that time that the divorce was an affair they might properly speculate about. Mrs. Vereker knew well that her son would be hard on himself for the slightest unfairness, and forthwith climbed up to a pinnacle of flawless rectitude, for his confusion.

“My dear, it is absolutely *none*. Am I saying that it is? People’s past lives are no affair of ours. Am I saying that they are?”

“Well, no!”

“Very well, then, my dear, listen to what I do say, and do not misrepresent me. What I say is this—(Are you sure Perkins has mixed this medicine the same as the last? The taste’s different)—Now listen! What I say is, and I can repeat it any number of times, that it is useless to expect sensitiveness on such points under such circumstances. I am certain that your father, or your great-uncle, Dr. Everett Gayler, would not have hesitated to endorse my opinion that on the broad question of whether a girl should or should not dive off a boat rowed by an unmarried man, no one is less likely to form a correct judgment than a lady who was divorced from her husband twenty years ago in India. But I say nothing against Mrs. Fenwick. She is, so far as she is known to me, an excellent person, and a good wife and mother. Now, my dear Conrad, I must rest, for I fear I have talked too much.”

Poor Prosy! All the edge of his joy of the morning was taken off. But never mind! It would very soon be Sally herself again, and his thirsty soul would be drinking deep draughts of her at the pier-end, where the appointment was to be kept with the young lady and her dolly.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

AN iron pier, with a sense of lattice structure about it, is not to our old-fashioned minds nearly so fascinating as the wooden fabric of our early memories at more than one seaside resort of our boyhood. St. Sennan was of another school, or had become a convert or pervert, if a Saint may be judged by his pier. For this was iron or steel all through, barring the timber flooring, whose planks were a quarter of an inch apart, so that you could kneel down to see the water through if you were too short to see over the advertisements a sordid spirit of commercialism had blocked the side-railings with. And if you were three or four, and there was nobody to hold you up (because they were carrying baby), you did so kneel, and as like as not got tar on your knees, and it wouldn't come off. Anyhow, Miss Gwendolen Arkwright did, on her way to the appointment, and was reproved therefor. On which she also reproved dolly in identical terms, dolly having had a look through as well, though, indeed, she can hardly be said to have knelt.

But to console us for the loss of the solid groins and bolted timbers of our youth, and to make it palatable to us that the great seas should follow each other for ever almost unopposed—instead of being broken into floods of drenching foam visitors get wet-through in—this unsubstantial-looking piece of cage-work expanded as soon as it was well out in the open channel, and almost provided John Bull with another “other island.” And whereon the pier-company's sordid commercialism had suggested the construction of a Chinese joss-house, or Indian bungalow—our description is a random one—that lent itself, or was lent by the company, at really an almost nominal figure, for entertainments in the afternoon all through the season. And round this structure were things desirable by all mankind, and supposed to be desired by possessors of one penny willing to part with it. For a penny-in-the-slot you could learn your

fate from a Sibyl, and repent of having spent your penny on it. For another you could scent your pocket-handkerchief, and be sorry you hadn't kept your penny for chocolate. For another you could have the chocolate, and wish you had waited and taken a cigarette. And for another you could take the cigarette, and realise how ill-assorted are the flavours of chocolate and the best Virginian tobacco.

But the pennyworth that seemed the worthiest of its penny was, no doubt, the old-fashioned galvanic battery, which shocked you for a sixth part of the smallest sum required by literature on first publication. It had brass handles you took hold of, and brass basins with unholy water in them that made you curl up, and anybody else would do so too. And there was a bunch of wires to push in, and agonize the victim who, from motives not easily understood, laid himself open to torture. And it certainly said "whizzy-wizzy-wizz." But Gwenny's description had been wrong in one point. For it was yourself, the investigator, not the machine, that said "e-e-e-e!"

Now, this machine was in charge of a young woman, who was also the custodian of an invisible lady, who was to be seen for a penny each person, children half-price. This appeared to be a contradiction in terms, but public apathy accepted it without cavil. The taking of this phenomenon's gate-money seemed to be almost a sinecure. Not so the galvanic battery, which never disappointed anyone. It might disgust, or repel, those who had had no occasion to study this branch of science, but it always acted up to its professions. Those investigators who declined to have any more never could go away and complain that they had not had enough. And no one had ever been discontented with its baneful results when all the bundle of wires was put in; indeed, the young person in charge said she had never known anyone to drain this cup of scientific experience to the dregs. "Half-way in's enough for most," was her report of human endurance. It was a spirited little machine, though old-fashioned.

Miss Arkwright and her dolly, accompanied, as we have hinted, by her Nurse Jane and baby, whose violent temper had condemned his perambulator, and compelled his attendant to carry him—so she said—were beforehand at the place and hour named. For security against possible disappointment a fiction was resorted to that dolly wouldn't cry if her mamma talked seriously to her, and it was pointed out that Mr. Fenwick was



coming, and Mrs. Fenwick was coming, and Miss Nightingale was coming, and Dr. Vereker was coming—advantage being taken of an infant's love of vain repetitions. But all these four events turned on dolly being good and not crying, and the reflex action of this stipulation produced goodness in dolly's mamma, with the effect that she didn't roar, as, it seemed, she might otherwise have done.

Miss Gwendolen was, however, *that* impatient that no dramatic subterfuge, however skilfully engineered, could be relied upon to last. Fortunately, a young lady she recognised, and a gentleman whom she did not personally know, but had seen on the beach, became interested in baby, who took no notice of them, and hiccupped. But, then, his eyes were too beady to have any human expression; perhaps it was more this than a contempt for vapid compliment that made him seem unsympathetic. The young lady, however, congratulated him on his *personnel* and on the variety of his attainments; and this interested Miss Gwendolen, who continued not to roar, and presently volunteered a statement on her own account.

"My mummar zis a-comin', and Miss Ninedale zis a-comin', and Miss Ninedale's mummar zis a-comin', and . . . ." But Nurse Jane interposed, on the ground that the lady knew already who was coming. She had no reason for supposing this; but a general atmosphere of omniscience among grown-up classes is morally desirable. It was, however, limited to Clause 1. Miss Gwenny went on to the consideration of Clause 2 without taking a division.

"To see dolly danvalised for a penny. My mummar says—see—sall—div me a penny. . . ."

"To galvanise dolly? How nice that will be!—Isn't she a dear little thing, Paggy?—And we're just in time to see it. Now, that is nice!" Observe Lætitia's family name for her husband, born of Cattley's.

"Isn't that them coming, Tish?" Yes, it is. They are conscientiously negotiating the turnstile at the pier-entrance, where one gets a ticket that lets you on all day, and you lose it. Conscientiously, because the pier-company often left its side-gate open, and relied on public spirit to acquiesce in its turnstile without dispute.

But Bradshaw has the misfortune to fall in Nurse's good opinion. For he asks who the important-looking party is, and is called to order.

“Sh-sh-iii-sh, love! Do take care! Gwenny’s mamma—Mrs. Chesterfield Arkwright. They’ve a house at Boxley Heath—friends of the Hugh Jameses—those very high-flying people.” This is not *à pleine voix*, and a well-disciplined Nurse knows better than to hear it.

Miss Gwenny and dolly consent to accompany the lady and gentleman to meet the party, the former undertaking to point out her mamma. “I sall sow you wiss,” she says; and then gives descriptive particulars of the conduct of the galvanic battery, and forecasts its effect on dolly.

“There’s that dear little pet,” says Sally; and resumes the operation of spoiling the little pet on the spot. She isn’t sorry to cally the pet (whose phonetics we employ) “dest wunced round the p on her soulders, only zis wunced.” She is a little silent, is Sally, and preoccupied—perhaps won’t object to a romp to divert her thoughts. Because she is afraid poor Prosy is in the tentacles of the Octopus. She evidently is not in love with him; if she were she would be feeling piqued at his not being in time to the appointment, not fidgeting about his losing the fun. She made some parade, at any rate, of her misgivings that poor Dr. Conrad had got hooked by his Goody, and would be late. If she *was* piqued she concealed it. Whichever it was, she found it congenial to “cally” Miss Arkwright on her “soulders” twiced round the pier-end before the party arrived within range of the battery. They meanwhile—that is to say, Rosalind and her husband, Lætitia and hers, with Sally and Gwenny’s mamma—lingered slowly along the pier listening to the experiences of the latter, of men, women, and things among the right sort of people.

“You really never know, and one cannot be too careful. So much turns on the sort of people you let your daughter get mixed up with. I’m sure Mrs. Fenwick will agree with me that Mrs. Hugh James was right. You see, I’ve known her from a child, and a more unworldly creature never breathed. But she asked me, and I could only say what I did: ‘Take the child at once to Paris and Ems and Wiesbaden—anywhere for a change. Even a tradesman is better than a professional man. In that case there may be money. But nowadays none of the professions pay. And their connexions are most undesirable.’”

“Now *I* should call that a brig.” Thus Bradshaw, pursuing the great controversy. But Fenwick knows better, or thinks he does. She’s a brigantine, and there are sprits’ls on both



masts, and only one square sail on the foremast. He may be right, for anything we know. Anyhow, her sheets are white in the sun, as she tacks down channel against the west or southwest wind, which has freshened. And she is a glorious sight as she comes in quite close to the pier-head, and goes into stays—(is that right ?)—and her great sails flap and swing, and a person to whom caution is unknown, and who cares for nothing in heaven or earth, sits unconcerned on a string underneath her bowsprit, and gets wet through every time she plunges, doing something nautical in connexion with her foresail overhead. And then she leans over in the breeze, and the white sheets catch it full—so near you can hear the boom click as it swings, and the rattle of the cordage as it runs through the blocks—and then she gets her way on her, and shoots off through a diamond-drench of broken seas, and we who can borrow the coastguard's telescope can know that she is the Mary of Penzance, but are none the wiser. And a man stripped to the waist, who is washing radishes on the poop, continues washing radishes unmoved, and ignores all things else.

“As far as the young man himself goes, I believe there is nothing to be said. But the mother is quite unpresentable, perfectly impossible. And the eldest sister is married to a Dissenting clergyman—a very worthy man, no doubt, but not exactly. And the girls are loud, etc., etc., etc.” Miss Arkwright's mamma ripples on, even as persons of condition ripple ; and Tishy, whose views in this direction have undergone expansion, manages to forget how she has done the same herself—not long ago, neither !—and decides that the woman is detestable.

Not so her daughter, who, with Sally as guardian and dolly as ward, is awaiting the arrival of the party at the galvanic battery. She is yearning for the great event ; not for a promised land of jerks and spasms for herself, but for her putative offspring. She encourages the latter, telling her not to be pitened and kye. Dolly doesn't seem apprehensive—shows great self-command, in fact.

But this detestable mother of a lovable daughter and an untempting granddaughter is destined to become still more detestable in the eyes of the Julius Bradshaws before she exhausts her topic. For as the party draws near to the scene of scientific recreation—and progress is slow, as she is deliberate as well as detestable ; and, of course, is the pace-maker—she



climbs up to a higher platform, as it were, for the contemplation of a lower deep. She assumes, for purposes of temporary handling of the subject, the air of one too far removed to know more about its details than the seismograph at Greenwich knows about the earthquake in the Andes. A dim contemplation of a thing afar—to be forgotten on the spot, after record made.

“ Luckily, it’s not so bad in this case as—(Gweny, you’re tiring Miss Nightingale. Come down!)—not so bad in this case as—(NO, my dear! you *must* wait for dolly to be galvanised. Come down at once, and don’t make conditions.) ”

“ But I love having her dearly—do let me keep her!” from Sally.

And from the human creature on her shoulders, “ Miss Nine-dale says ‘ No!’ ”

“ Not so bad, you were saying, as . . . ?” Thus Rosalind, to divert the conversation from the child.

“ Oh dear! What *was* I saying? That child! What plagues the little things are!” The lady closes her eyes for two seconds behind a horizontal gloved hand, a seclusion to recollect in; then continues: “ Oh yes, when it’s a shopman. I dare say you’ve heard of that very painful case—daughter of a well-known Greek Pr . . . ”

But the speaker has tact enough to see her mistake from the simultaneous loud speech it provokes. Every one seems to have something vociferous to say, and all speak at once. Sally’s contribution is a suggestion that before dolly is put to the torture we shall go into the downstairs place and see the gentleman who’s fishing catch a big grey mullet. It is adopted. Rosalind only remains upstairs, and takes the opportunity to communicate the Julius Bradshaw epic to Gweny’s mamma, who will now be more careful than ever about the sort of people you pick up at the seaside and drop. She puts these words by in her mind, for Gweny’s papa, later on.

The gentleman who is to be seen catching the big grey mullet hadn’t caught it, so far—not when the party arrived on the strange middle-deck of the pier the water reaches at high tide, and persuades occasional molluscs to grow on the floor of, with promises of a bath next month. The green reflected light from the endless rise and fall of the waves Gweny could see (without getting down) through the floor-gaps, seemed to be urging the fisher-gentleman to give it up, and pointing out that the grey mullet was down here, and didn’t mean to be caught. But he

paid no attention, and only went on doing all the things that fishers do. He ascribed the fishes' reluctance to bite to the sort of sky, and not to common sense on their part. He tried the other side instead. He lost his worm, and blamed him for going off the hook—which he would have done himself, and he knew it! He believed, honestly, that a fish of fabulous dimensions had thought seriously of biting, and would have bitten, only you got in the light, or made a noise.

But there was no noise to speak of, really, except the clunk-clunk of one or two moored rowboats down below, and the sh-r-r-r-r-p (if that spells it) of their corrugated plank-sides, as they dipped and dripped alternately. They were close to the bottom flight of stairs, whose lowest step was left forlorn in the air, and had to be jumped off when a real spring-tide came that knew its business.

Gweny's remark, "Ze man is fassin'," seemed to point to an incubation of an idea, familiar to maturer life, that fishing is more truly a state than an action. But the addendum—that he didn't cass any fiss—betrayed her inexperience. Maturity does not call attention to ill-success; or, if it does, it lays it at the door of the fish.

"What a jolly header one could have from here! No railings or anything. No—ducky! I won't put you down to look over the edge. That's not a thing for little girls to do."

"You'd never get up again, Sarah. You'd have to swim ashore."

"One could swim round the steps, Jeremiah—at least, according to the tide. It's slack water now."

"I wish, Mr. Fenwick—(so does Julius)—that you would make that girl reasonable. She'll drown herself before she's done."

"I know she will, Mrs. Paganini. Sure and certain! Nobody can stop her. But Vereker's going to bring her to."

"Where is the doctor, Tish? Didn't he say he was coming?" This was Bradshaw. He usually says things to his wife, and leaves publication to her.

"Of course he said he was coming. I wonder if anything's the matter?"

"Oh, no! It's his ma! The Goody's put an embargo on him, and kept him at home. Poor Prosy!" Sally is vexed, too. But observe!—she knows perfectly well that nothing but the Goody would have kept Prosy from his appointment.



No one in particular, but every one more or less, supposes that now we must go back for dolly to be galvanised, Tishy rather reluctantly, for she does not share her husband's indifference about what the detestable one above says on the subject of shopmen; Miss Arkwright greedily, being reminded of a higher object in life than mere grey mullet catching. She, however, ascribes her avidity to dolly, calling on public credulity to believe that the latter has spoken to that effect.

The arrangement of dolly in connexion with the two brass handles offers difficulties, but a felicitous solution is discovered, for not only will dolly remain in contact with both if her arms are thrust inside them, but insomuch as her sleeves are stiff and expansive, and require a perceptible pull to withdraw them, will remain suspended in mid-air without further support, to enjoy the rapture or endure the torture of the current, as may prove to be the case. From this arises an advantage—namely, that her mamma will be able to give her attention to the regulator, and shift the wire bundle in and out, with a due regard to dolly's powers of endurance.

What little things the lives of the folk in this story have turned on! Now, suppose Gwenny had never been allowed to take charge of that regulator! However, this is anticipation.

When dolly had endured unmoved the worst that science could inflict, nothing would satisfy Miss Gwenny but that every one else should take hold in a circle, as on a previous occasion, and that she should retain control of the regulator. The experiment was tried as proposed, all present joining in it except Mrs. Arkwright, who excused herself owing to the trouble of taking her gloves off. Including nurse, there were six persons. However, as nurse couldn't abide it, almost before it had begun to say whizzy-wizzy-wizz, this number was reduced to five.

"Keep your eye on the kid, my dear," said Fenwick, addressing the presiding young lady in his easy-going way; "don't let her put it on all at once. Are you ready, Sarah? You ready, Mrs. Paganini? All right—fire away!"

The young lady in charge kept a careful hand near Miss Gwenny's, who was instructed or guided to increase the current gradually. Her attitude was docile and misleading.

"Go on—a little more—yes, a little more.... No, that's enough!.... Oh, what nonsense! that's nothing!.... Oh, Sally, do let *go*!.... Oh, Tishy, what a goose you are! That's nothing.... E-ow! It's horrible. I won't have any more of



it." The chorus of exclamations, which you may allot at choice, ended in laughter as the galvanised circle broke up.

"Well, you are a lot of weak-kneed . . . conductivities," said Fenwick, feeling for the word. "That was nothing, as Sarah says."

"Look here," suggested Sally. "Me get between you two men, and Gwenny stick it in full up." This was done, and Sally heroically endured the "full up" current, which, as you doubtless are aware, increases in viciousness as it has fewer and fewer victims. But she wasn't sorry when it was over, for all that.

"You and I could take it full up," said Fenwick to Bradshaw, who assented. But Paganini evidently didn't like it when it came to three-quarters. Also, his wife said to him, "You'll spoil your fingering, Julius."

Fenwick seemed to think them all over-sensitive. "I could stand that by myself," said he, and took both handles.

But just at this moment a strange event happened. Somebody actually applied to see the invisible lady. The eyes of the damsel in charge were for one moment withdrawn from Miss Gwenny, who promptly seized the opportunity to thrust in the regulator "full up."

Fenwick wasn't going to cry for mercy—not he! But his lips clenched and his eyes glared, and his hands shook. "How can you be such a *goose*, Jeremiah?" said Sally, who was standing close by the battery, opposite to Gwenny. She thrust back the regulator, and put an end to Fenwick's excruciations.

He said, "What did you do that for, Sarah? I could have stood it for six months."

And Sally replied: "For shame, you wicked story! And after you'd been electrocuted once, too!"

Fenwick burst into a great laugh, and exclaimed, "What on earth are we all torturing ourselves for? Do let's go and get some tea." And then carried Gwenny on his shoulders to the pier-entrance, where he delivered her to her proprietors, and then they all sauntered teawards, laughing and chatting.

Rosalind thought she had never seen Gerry in such health and spirits. On their way up to the house they passed Punch, leaning over the footlights to rejoice in his iniquity. Few persons of healthy sympathies can pass Punch, and these only under the strongest temptation, such as tea. Rosalind and Lætitia and her husband belonged to the latter class, but Fenwick and

Sally elected to see the immortal drama to a close. It lasted nearly through the remainder of Fenwick's cigar, and then they came away, reluctant, and wanting more of the same sort.

It was then that Sally's stepfather said a rather singular thing to her—a thing she remembered afterwards, though she noticed it but slightly at the time. She had said to him :

“Codling and Short will be quite rich men ! What a lot of money you've given them, Jeremiah !”

And he had replied : “Don't they deserve it ?”

They had then walked on together up the road, he taking her arm in his hand, as is the way nowadays, but saying nothing. Presently he said, as he threw away the very last end of the cigar :

“It was the first lesson of my early boyhood in retributive injustice. It's a poor heart that never rejoices at Punch.”

It was the first time Sally had ever heard him speak of his boyhood except as a thing he had forgotten.

\* \* \* \* \*

Much, so much, of this chapter is made up of matter so trifling. Was it worth recording ? The chronicler might plead again as excuse his temptation to linger over the pleasant hours it tells of, the utter freedom of its actors from care, and his reluctance to record their sequel. But a better apology for his prolixity and detail would be found in the wonder felt by those actors when in after-life they looked back and recalled them one by one ; and the way each memory linked itself, in a way unsuspected at the time, with an absolutely unanticipated future. For even Rosalind, with all her knowledge of the past, had no guess, for all her many misgivings and apprehensions, of the way that things would go. Never had she been freer from a sense of the shadow of a coming cloud than when she looked out from the window while the tea she had just made was mellowing, and saw her husband and daughter coming through the little garden gate, linked together and in the best of spirits.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

It was quite true, as Sally had surmised, that poor Prosy had been entangled in the meshes of his Octopus. But Sally had also recorded her conviction that he would turn up at tea. He did so, with apologies. You see, he hadn't liked to come away while his mother was asleep, in case she should ask for him when she woke up, and she slept rather longer than usual.

"She may have been trying to do too much lately," said he, with a beautiful faith in some mysterious activities practised by the Goody unseen. Sally cultivated this faith also, to the best of her ability, but she can hardly be said to have embraced it. The way in which she and her mother lent themselves to it was, nevertheless, edifying.

"You mustn't let her overdo it, doctor," said Rosalind, seriously believing herself truthful. And Sally, encouraged by her evident earnestness, added, "And make her take plenty of nourishment. That's half the battle."

Whereupon Lætitia, swept, as it were, into the vortex of a creed, found it in her to say, "As long as she doesn't get low." It was not vigorous, and lacked completion, but it reassured and enforced. By the time the little performance was done every one in the room believed that Mrs. Vereker did down the stairs, or scoured out saucepans, or at least dusted. Even her son believed, so forcible was the unanimity. Perhaps there was a taint of the incredulous in the minds of Fenwick and Bradshaw. But each thought the other was heart-whole, and neither suspected himself of insincerity.

Sally was curious to know exactly what lines the Octopus had operated on. That would do later, though. She would get Prosy by himself, and make him tell her all about it. In the course of time tea died a natural death. Fenwick indulged in a yawn and a great shake, and remembered that he had no end of letters to answer. Mr. and Mrs. Julius Bradshaw suddenly thought,



for no reasonable reason, that they ought to be getting back. But they didn't really go home. They went for a walk landward, as it was so windy, instead—remember that they were only in the third week of their honeymoon! Sally, with Talleyrand-like diplomacy, achieved that she and Dr. Conrad should go for another walk in another direction. The sea was getting up and the glass was going down, and it would be fun to go and see the waves break over the jetty. So said Sally, and Dr. Conrad thought so too, unequivocally. They walked away in the big sea-wind, fraught with a great inheritance from the Atlantic of cool warmth and dry moisture. And if you don't know what that means, you know mighty little of the ocean in question.

Rosalind watched them through the window, closed perforce, and saw them disappear round the flagstaff with the south cone hoisted, holding their heads on to all appearance. She said to herself: "Foolish fellow, why can't he speak?" And her husband answered either her thought or her words—though he could hardly have heard them as he sat driving his pen furiously through letters—with: "He'll have to confess up, Rosey, you'll see, before he goes."

She made no reply; but, feeling a bit tired, lay down to rest on the sofa. And so powerful was the sea air, and the effect of a fair allowance of exercise, that she fell into a doze in spite of the intensely wakeful properties of Mrs. Lobjoit's horsehair sofa, which only a corrugated person could stop on without a maintained effort, so that sound sleep was impossible. She never became quite unconscious of the scratching pen and the moaning wind; so, as she did not sleep, yet did not want to wake, she remained hovering on the borderland of dreams. One minute she thought she was thinking, sanely, about Sally and her silent lover—always uppermost in her thoughts—the next, she was alive to the absurdity of some dream-thing one of them had suddenly changed to, unnoticed. Once, half awake, she was beginning to consider, seriously, whether she could not legitimately approach the Octopus on the subject, but only to find, the moment after, that the Octopus (while remaining the same) had become the chubby little English clergyman that had married her to Gerry at Umballa, twenty years ago. Then she thought she would wake, and took steps towards doing it; but, as ill-luck would have it, she began to speak before she had achieved her purpose. And the result was: "Do you remember

the Reverend Samuel Herrick, Gerry, at Umb—— Oh dear ! I'm not awake. . . I was talking nonsense." Gerry laughed.

"Wake up, love !" said he. "Do your fine intelligence justice ! What was it you said ? Reverend Samuel who ?"

"I forget, darling. I was dreaming." Then, with a nettle-grasping instinct, as one determined to flinch from nothing, "Reverend Samuel Herrick. What did you think I said ?"

"Reverend Samuel Herrick or Meyrick. . . . 'Not negotiable.' I don't mean the Reverend Sam, whoever he is, but the payee whose account I'm enriching." He folded the cheque he had been writing into its letter and enveloped it. But he paused on the brink of its gummed edge, looking over it at Rosalind, who was still engaged getting quite awake. "I know the name well enough. He's some chap ! I expect you saw him in the Chronicle."

"Very likely, darling ! He must be some chap, when you come to think of it." She says this slightly, as a mere rounding-off speech. Then goes behind her husband's chair and kisses him over his shoulder as he directs the envelope.

"Marmaduke, Copestake, Dickinson, and Humphreys," says he, as he writes the names. "Now I call that a firm-and-a-half. Old Broad Street, E.C. *That's* all !—as far as *he* goes. Now, how about Puckeridge, Limited ?" . . .

"Don't write any more, Gerry dear ; you'll spoil your eyes. Come and look at the sunset. Come along !" For a blood-red forecast of storm in the west, surer than the surest human barometer, is blazing through the window that cannot be opened for the blow, and turning the shell-work rabbit and the story of Goliath into gold and jewels. The sun is glancing through a rift in the cloud-bank, to say good-night to the winds and seas, and wish them joy of the high old time they mean to have in his absence, in the dark.

The lurid level rays that make an indescribable glory of Rosalind's halo-growth of hair as Gerry sees it against the window, have no ill-boding in them for either—no more, that is, than always has belonged to a rough night closing over the sea, and will do so always until the sea is ice again on a planet sick to death. As he draws her arm round his neck and she his round her waist, and they glance at each other in the flaming glow, there is no thought in either of any ill impending for themselves.

"I wish Sarah were here to see you now, Rosey."



“So should I, love! Only she would see you too. And then she’d make you vainer than you are already. All men are patches of Vanity.” But I forgive you.” She kisses him slightly in confirmation. They certainly were a wonderful sight, the two of them, a minute ago, when the light was at its best. Yes!—they wish Sally had been there, each on the other’s account. It was difficult to say which of the two had thought of Sally first. Both had this habit of registering the *rapport* of everything to Sally as a first duty.

But a sunset glow, like this one, lasts, maybe, little longer than a highest song-note may be sustained. It was to die. But Rosalind and Gerry watched it out. His cheek was resting in the thick mass of soft gold, just moving slightly to be well aware of it. The sun-ray touched it, last of anything in the room, and died. . . .

“What’s that, dear love? *Why?* . . .” It was Rosalind that spoke.

“Nothing, dearest! No, nothing! . . . Indeed, nothing at all!”

“Gerry, what *was* it?”

“What was what, dear?”

“What made you leave off so suddenly?”

For the slightly intermittent movement of his cheek on her hair—what hairy thing is there that does not love to be stroked?—had stopped; and his hand that held hers had slipped from it, and rested for a moment on his own forehead.

“It’s gone now. It was a sort of recurrence. I haven’t been having them lately. . . .”

“Come and sit down, love. There, now, don’t fidget! What was it about?” Does he look pale—thinks Rosalind—or is it only the vanished glow?

He is uncommunicative. Suppose they go out for a turn before dinner, he suggests. They can walk down to the jetty, and meet Sarah and her medical adviser. Soon said, soon settled. Ten minutes more, and they are on their way to the fisher-dwellings: experiencing three-quarters of a gale, it appears, on the testimony of an Ancient Mariner in a blue and white-striped woollen shirt, who knows about things.

“That was *very* queer, that recurrence!” Thus Gerry, after leaving the Ancient Mariner. “It was just as the little edge of the sun went behind the bank. And what do you think my mind hooked it on to, of all things in the world?” Rosalind



couldn't guess, of course. "Why, a big wheel I was trying to stop, that went slowly—slowly—like the sun vanishing. And then just as the sun went it stopped."

"Was there anything else?" Entire concealment of alarm is all Rosalind can attend to.

"No end of things, all mixed up together. One thing very funny. A great big German chap. . . . I say, Rosalind!"

"What, Gerry darling?"

"Do you recollect, when we were in Switzerland, up at that last high-up place, Seelisberg—Sonnenberg—do you remember the great fat Baron that gave me those cigars, and sang?"

"Remember the Baron? Of course I do. Perfectly!" Rosalind contrived a laugh. "Was he in it?" Perhaps this was rash. But then, not to say it would have been cowardice, when it was on her tongue-tip. Let the nettle be grasped.

"He was in it, singing and all. But the whole thing was mixed up and queer. It all went, quite suddenly. And I should have lost him out of it, as one loses a dream, if it hadn't been for seeing him in Switzerland. It was something to hold on by. Do you understand?"

"I think I do. I had forgotten what I was dreaming about when I woke on the sofa and talked that nonsense. But I held on to the name, for all that."

"But then that wasn't a real person, the Reverend—what was he?—Herrick or Derrick."

Rosalind passed the point by. "Gerry darling! I want you to do as I tell you. Don't worry your head about it, but keep quiet. If memory is coming back to you, it will come all the quicker for letting your mind rest. Let it come gradually."

"I see what you mean. You think it was really a recollection of B.C.?"

"I think so. Why should it not?"

"But it's all gone clean away again! And I can't remember anything of it at all—and there was heaps!"

"Never mind! If it was real it will come back. Wait and be patient!"

Rosalind's mind laid down this rule for itself—to think and act exactly as though there had been nothing to fear. Even if all the past had been easy to face it would have shrunk from suggestions. So thought she to herself, perhaps with a little

excusable self-deception. Otherwise the natural thing would have been to repeat to him all the Baron's story.

No ! She would not say a word, or give a hint. If it was all to come back to him, it would come back. If not, she could not bring it back ; and she might, in the attempt to do so, merely plunge his injured mind into more chaotic confusion. Much safer to do nothing !

But why this sudden stirring of his memory, just now of all times ? Had anything unusual happened lately ? Naturally, the inquiry sent her mind back, to yesterday first, then to the day before. No !—there was nothing there. Then to generalities. Was it the sea bathing ?—the sea air ? And then on a sudden she thought of the thing nearest at hand, that she should have thought of at first. Yes !—she would ask Dr. Conrad about *that* : Why hadn't she thought of that before—that galvanic battery ?

Meanwhile, despite her injunctions to her husband to wait and be patient, his mind kept harking back on this curious recollection. Luckily, so it seemed to her—at any rate for the present—he did not seem to recall the Baron's recognition of himself, or to connect it with this illusion or revival. He appeared to recollect the Baron's personality, and his liberality with cigars, but little else. If he was to be reminded of this, it must be after she had talked over it with Vereker.

They struggled with the weather along the seaward face of the little old fisher-town. The great wind was blowing the tan-laden atmosphere of the nets and the all-pervading smell of tar landward ; and substituting flecks of driven foam, that it forced to follow landward too, for all they tried to stop and rest. The population was mostly employed getting the boats up as close to the houses as practice permitted, and the capstans were all a-creak with the strain ; and one shrieked for a dab of lard, and got it, just as they passed. The man with Bessie and the anchor on his arms—for it was his—paused in his rotations with one elbow on his lever, and one foot still behind the taut cable he was crossing. His free hand saluted ; and then, his position being defined, he was placed on a moral equality with his superiors, and could converse. The old-fashioned hat-touch, now dying out, is just as much a protest against the way social order parts man from man as it is an acknowledgment of its necessity.

The lover of Bessie and Elinor and Kate was disposed to

ignore the efforts of the wind. There might, he said, be a bit of sea on, come two or three in the marn'n'—at the full of the tide. The wind might get up a bit, if it went round suth'ard. The wind was nothing in itself—it was the direction it came from ; it got a bad character from imputed or vicarious vice. It would be a bit rough to get a boat off—the lady might get a wetting. . . . At which point Rosalind interrupted. Nothing was further from her thoughts, she said, than navigation in any form. But had the speaker seen her daughter go by—the young lady that swam ? For Sally was famous. He hadn't, himself, but maybe young Benjamin had. Who, taking leave to speak from this, announced frankly that he *had* seen a young lady, in company with her sweetheart, go by nigh an hour ago. The tattooed one diluted her sweetheart down to “ her gentleman ” reluctantly. In his land, and the one there would soon be for the freckled and blue-eyed Benjamin, there was no such artificial nonsense. Perhaps some sense of this showed itself in the way he resumed his work. “ Now, yoong Benjamin—a-action ! ” said he ; and the two threw themselves again against the pole of the mollified capstan.

If Rosalind fancied this little incident had put his previous experience out of her husband's mind she was mistaken. He said, as they passed on in the direction of the jetty, “ I think I should like to wind up capstans. It would suit me down to the ground.” But then became thoughtful ; and, just as they were arriving at the jetty, showed that his mind had run back by asking suddenly, “ What was the fat Baron's name ? ”

“ Diedrich Kammerkreutz.” Rosalind gave him her nearest recollection, seeing nothing to be gained by doing otherwise. Any concealments, too, the chances were, would make matters worse instead of better.

“ It was Kreutzkammer, in my—dream or whatever you call it.” They stopped and looked at each other, and Rosalind replied, “ It *was* Kreutzkammer. Oh dear ! ” rather as one who has lost breath from some kind of blow.

He saw her distress instantly, and was all alive to soothe it. “ Don't be frightened, darling love ! ” he cried, and then his great good-humoured laugh broke into the tenderness of his speech, without spoiling it. He was so like Gerry, the boy that rode away that day in the dog-cart, when there was “ only mamma for the girl.”



"But when all's said and done," said she, harking back for a reprieve, "perhaps you only recollected Sonnenberg in your dream better than I did. . . . just now. . ." She hung fire of repeating the name Herrick.

"*Ach zo,*" he answered, teutonically for the moment, from association with the Baron. "But suppose it all true, dearest, and that I'm going to come to life again, what does it matter? It can't alter *us*, that I can see. Could anything that you can imagine? I should be Gerry for you, and you would be Rosey for me, to the end of it." Her assent had a mere echo of hesitation. But he detected it, and went on: "Unless, you mean, I remembered the hypothetical wife? . . ."

"Ye—es!—partly."

"Well! I tell you honestly, Rosey darling, if I do, I shall keep her to myself. A plaguing, intrusive female—to come between *us*. But there's no such person!" At which they both laughed, remembering the great original non-exister. But even here was a little thorn. For Mrs. Harris brought back the name the Baron had known Gerry by. He did not seem to have resumed it in his dream.

The jetty ran a little way out to sea. Thus phraseology in use. It might have reconsidered itself, and said that the jetty had at some very remote time run out to sea and stopped there. Ever since, the sea had broken over it at high tides, and if you cared at all about your clothes you wouldn't go to the end of it, if you were me. Because the salt gets into them and spoil the dye. Besides, you have to change everything.

There was a dry place at the end of the jetty, and along the edge of the dry place were such things as cables go round and try hard to draw, as we drew the teeth of our childhood with string. But they fail always, although their pulls are never irresolute. On two of these sat Sally and the doctor in earnest conversation.

Rosalind and her husband looked at each other and said. "No!" This might have been rendered, "Matters are no forwarder." It connected itself (without acknowledgment) with the distance apart of the two cable-blocks. Never mind; let them alone!

"Are you two going to sit there till the tide goes down?"

"Oh, is that you? We didn't see you coming."

"You'll have to look sharp, or you'll be wet-through. . . ."

"No we *shan't*! You only have to wait a minute and get in between. . . ."

Easier said than done! A big wave, that was just in time to overhear this conversation imperfectly, thought it would like to wet Sally through, and leaped against the bulwark of the jetty. But it spent itself in a huge torrential deluge while Sally waited a minute. A friend followed it, but made a poor figure by comparison. Then Sally got in between, followed by the doctor. . . . Well! they were really not so *very* wet, after all! Sally was worst, as she was too previous. She got implicated in the friend's last dying splash, while Prosy got nearly scot-free. So said Sally to Fenwick as they walked briskly ahead towards home, leaving the others to make their own pace. Because it was a case of changing everything, and dinner was always so early at St. Sennans.

"Let them go on in front. I want to talk to you, Dr. Conrad." Rosalind, perhaps, thinks his attention won't wander if she takes a firm tone; doesn't feel sure about it, otherwise. Maybe Sally is too definitely in possession of the citadel to allow of an incursion from without. She continues: "I have something to tell you. Don't look frightened. It is nothing but what you have predicted yourself. My husband's memory is coming back. I don't know whether I ought to say I am afraid or I hope it is so. . . ."

"But are you sure it is so?"

"Yes, listen! It has all happened since you and Sally left." And then she narrated to the doctor, whose preoccupation had entirely vanished, first the story of the recurrence, and Fenwick's description of it in full; and then the incident of the Baron at Sonnenberg, but less in detail. Then she went on, walking slower, not to reach the house too soon. "Now, this is the thing that makes me so sure it is recollection: just now, as we were coming to the jetty, he asked me suddenly what was the Baron's name. I gave a wrong version of it, and he corrected me." This does not meet an assent.

"That was nothing. He had heard it at Sonnenberg. I think much more of the story itself; the incident of the wheel and so on. Are you quite sure you never repeated this German gentleman's story to Mr. Fenwick?"

"Quite sure."

"H'm . . . !"

"So, you see, I want you to help me to think."

"May I talk to him about it?—speak openly to him?"

"Yes; to-morrow, not to-day. I want to hear what he says to-night. He always talks a great deal when we're alone at the end of the day. He will do so this time. But I want you to tell me about an idea I have."

"What idea?"

"Did Sally tell you about the galvanic battery on the pier?" Dr. Conrad stopped in his walk, and faced round towards his companion. He shook out a low whistle—an *arpeggio* down. "Did she tell you?" repeated Rosalind.

"Miss Sa . . ."

"Come, come, doctor! Don't be ridiculous. Say Sally!" The young man's heart gave a responsive little jump, and then said to itself, "But perhaps I'm only a family friend!" and climbed down. However, on either count, "Sally" was nicer than "Miss Sally."

"Sally told me about the electric entertainment at the pier-end. I'm sorry I missed it. But if *that's* what's done it, Fenwick must try it again."

"*Mustn't* try it again?"

"No—*must* try it again. Why, do you think it bad for him to remember?"

"I don't know what to think."

"My notion is that a man has a right to his own mind. Anyhow, one has no right to keep him out of it."

"Oh no; besides, Gerry isn't out of it in this case. Not out of his mind. . . ."

"I didn't mean that way. I meant excluded from participation in himself . . . you see?"

"Oh yes, I quite understand. Now listen, doctor. I want you to do me a kindness. Say nothing, even to Sally, till I tell you. Say *nothing*!"

"You may trust me." Rosalind feels no doubt on that point, the more so that the little passage about Sally's name has landed her at some haven of the doctor's confidence that neither knows the name of just yet. He is not the first man that has felt a welcome in some trifling word of a very special daughter's mother. But woe be to the mother who is premature and spoils all! Poor Prosy is too far gone to be a risky subject of experiment. But *he* won't say anything—not he! "After all, you know," he continues, "it may all turn out a false alarm. Or false hope, should I say?"



No answer. And he doesn't press for one. He is in a land of pitfalls.

"What have you and your medical adviser been talking about all the while, there in mid-ocean?" Fenwick forgets the late event with pleasure. Sally, with her hair threatening to come down in the wind, is enough to stampede a troop of night-mares.

"Poor Prosy!" is all the answer that comes at present. Perhaps if that uncontrolled black coil will be tractable she will concede more anon. You can't get your hair back under your hat and walk quick and talk, all at the same time.

"Poorer than usual, Sarah?" But really just at this corner it's as much as you can do, if you have skirts, to get along at all; to say nothing of the way such loose ends as you indulge in turn on you and flagellate your face in the wind. Oh, the vicious energy of that stray ribbon! Fancy having to use up one hand to hold that!

But a lull came when the corner was fairly turned, in the lee of a home of many nets, where masses of foam-fleck had found a respite, and leisure to collapse, a bubble at a time. You could see the prism-scale each had to itself, each of the millions, if you looked close enough. Collectively, their appearance was slovenly. A chestnut-coloured man a year old, who looked as if he meant some day to be a boatswain, was seated on a pavement that cannot have soothed his unprotected flesh—flint pebbles can't, however round—and enjoying the mysterious impalpable nature of this foam. However, even for such hands as his—and Sally wanted to kiss them badly—they couldn't stop. She got her voice, though, in the lull.

"Yes—a little. I've found out all about Prosy."

"Found out about him?"

"I've made him talk about it. It's all about his ma and a young lady he's in love with. . . ." Fenwick's *ha!* or *h'm!* or both joined together, was probably only meant to hand the speaker on, but the tone made her suspicious. She asked him why he said that, imitating it; on which he answered, "Why shouldn't he?" "Because," said Sally, "if you fancy Prosy's in love with me, you're mistaken."

"Very good! Cut along, Sarah! You've made him talk about the young lady he's in love with . . . ?"

"Well, he as good as talked about her, anyhow! I under-

stood quite plain. He wants to marry her awfully, but he's afraid to say so to her, because of his ma."

"Doesn't Mrs. Vereker like her?"

"Dotes upon her, he says. Ug-g-h! No, it isn't that. It's the lugging the poor girl into his ma's sphere of influence. He's conscious of his ma, but adores her. Only he's aware she's overwhelming, and always gets her own roundabout way. I prefer Tishy's dragon, if you ask *me*."

At this point Sally is quite unconscious of Fenwick's amused eyes fixed on her, and his smile in ambush. She says the last words through a hairpin, while her hands take advantage of the lull to make a good job of that rope of black hair. She will go on and tell all the story; so Fenwick doesn't speak. Surprised at first by the tale of Dr. Conrad's young lady, his ideas have by now fructified. Sally continues:

"He's often told me he thought G.P.'s were better single, for their wives' sakes—that sounds wrong, somehow!—but it isn't that. It's his ma entirely. I suppose he's told you about the epileptiform disorders?" No, he hadn't. "Well, now! Fancy Prosy not telling you that! He's become quite an authority since those papers he had in the 'Lancet,' and he's thinking of giving up general practice. Sir Dioscorides Gayler's a cousin of his, you know, and would pass on his practice to Prosy on easy terms. House in Seymour Street, Portman Square. Great authority on epilepsy and epileptiform disorders. Wants a successor who knows about 'em. Naturally. Wants three thousand pounds. Naturally. Big fees! But he would make it easy for Prosy."

"That would be all right; soon manage that." Fenwick speaks with the confidence of one in a thriving trade. The deity of commerce, security, can manage all things. Insecurity is atheism in the City. "But then," he adds, "Vereker wouldn't marry, even with a house and big-fee consultations, because he's afraid his mother would hector over his wife. Is that it?"

"That's it! It's his Goody mother. I say, it *is* blowing!" It was, and they had emerged from the shelter into the wind. No more talk!

As Fenwick, sea-blown and salted, resorted to the lodging-house allowance of fresh water and soap, in a perfunctory and formal preparation for dinner, his mind ran continually on Sally's communication. As for the other young lady being

valid, that he dismissed as nonsense not worth consideration. Vereker had been resorting to a furtive hint of a declaration, disguised as fiction. It was a *fabula narrata de Sally, mutato nomine*. If she didn't see through it, and respond in kind, it would show him how merely a friend he was, and nothing more. "Perhaps he doesn't understand our daughter's character," said Fenwick to Rosalind, when he had repeated the conversation to her. "Of course he doesn't," she replied. "No young man of his sort understands girls the least. The other sort of young man understands the other sort of girls."

And then a passing wonderment had touched her mind, of how strange it was that Sally should be one of her own sort, so very distinctly. How about inheritance? She grew reflective and silent over it, and then roused herself to wonder, illogically, why Gerry hadn't gone on talking.

The reason was that as his mind dwelt happy and satisfied on the good prospect Vereker would have if he could step into his cousin's specialist practice as a consulting physician, with a reputation already begun, his thoughts were caught with a strange jerk. What and whence was a half-memory of some shadowy store of wealth that was to make it the easiest thing in the world for him to finance the new departure. It had nothing to do with the vast mysterious possibilities of credit. It was a recollection of some resourceful backing he was entitled to, somehow; and he was reminded by it of his dream about the furniture—(we told you of that?)—but with a reservation. When he woke from the sleep-dream of the furniture, he in a short time could distinctly identify it as a dream, and was convinced no such furniture had ever existed. He could not shake off this waking dream, and it clogged his mind painfully, and made him silent.

So much so that when Rosalind, soon completed for the banqueting-board, looked into the adjoining room to see what progress Gerry was making, and why he was silent, she only saw the back of a powerful frame in its shirt-sleeves, and a pair of hands holding on each side an unbrushed head. The elbows indispensable to them rested on the window-bar.

"Look alive, Gerry darling!—you'll make dinner late. . . . Anything wrong, dear love?" Sudden anxiety in her voice. "Is it another . . . ?" Another what? No need to define, exactly!

"A sort of one," Fenwick answers. "Not so bad as the last. Hardly describable! Never mind."



He made no effort towards description, and his wife did not press him for it. What good end could be gained by fidgetting him ?

But she knew now that her life would be weighted with an anxiety hard to bear, until his hesitating return of memory should make its decision of success or failure. A guarantee of the latter would have been most to her liking, but how could she hope for that now ?

## CHAPTER XXXV

THE speculative weather-wisdom of the tattooed capstan-driver was confirmed when three in the morning came, and the full of the tide. The wind must have gone round to the southward, or to some equally stimulating quarter, to judge by the work it got through that night in the way of roofs blown off and chimney-pots blown down ; standing crops laid flat and spoiled for reaping ; trees too full of leaf to bear such rough treatment compelled to tear up half their roots and fall, or pay tribute to the gale in boughs snapped asunder in time to spare their parent stem. All these results we landsmen could see for ourselves next day, after the storm had died down, and when the air was so delightful after it that we took walks in the country on purpose to enjoy it. But for the mischief it did that night at sea, from sportively carrying away the spars of ships, which they wanted for their own use, or blowing a stray reefer from the weather-earring, to sending a full crew to the depths below, or on jagged rocks no message from the white foam above could warn the look-out of in time—for the record of this we should have belated intermittent newspaper paragraphs, ever so long after.

But the wind had not reached its ideal when, at the end of a pleasant evening, Sally and her belongings decided that they must just go down to the beach and see the waves before going to bed. Wasn't there a moon ? Well—yes, there was a moon, but you couldn't see it. That made a difference, certainly, but not a conclusive one. It wasn't a bad sort of a night, although it certainly was blowing, and the waves would be grand seen close. So the party turned out to go down to the beach. It included the Julius Bradshaws and Dr. Conrad, who had looked in as usual. But the doctor found out that it was past eleven, and, recalled by duty, returned to his Octopus.

The waves, seen close, would have been grand if you could have seen them from the beach, or as much of it as they had left you

to stand on. But you really could only guess what was going on out in that great dark world of deep thunder, beyond the successive rushes of mad foam, each of which made up its mind to tear the coast up this time ; and then changed it and went back, but always took with it stones enough for next attempt. And the indignant clamour of the rushing shoals, dragged off to sea against their will, rose and fell in the lulls of the thunder beyond. Sally wanted to quote Tennyson's Maud about them, but she couldn't for the tremendous wind.

The propensity to throw stones into the water, whenever there are stones and water, is always a strong one, even when the water is black mountain ranges, foam-ridged Sierras coming on to crush us, appalling us, even though we know they are sure to die in time. Stones were thrown on this occasion by Sally and her stepfather, who was credulous enough to suppose that his pebbles passed the undertow and reached the sea itself. Sally was prevented by the elements from misusing an adjective ; for she wanted to say that the effect of a stone thrown into such a sea was merely "homœopathic," and abstained because her remark would have been unheard.

Fenwick wanted to say that it was like the way a man dies and vanishes into the great unknown. He, too, refrained from this, but only partly for the same reason. Its want of novelty made another.

All the others soon wanted to say it was time to go home to bed, and tried to say it. But practice seemed easier, and they all turned to go, followed by Fenwick and Sally, cheerfully discussing the point of whether Sally could have swum out into that sea or not. Sally wanted to know what was to prevent her. Obvious enough, one would have said !

But Rosalind noticed one thing that was a pleasure to her. The moment Sally came in, her husband's dream-afflictions went out. Had he ever spoken of one in her presence ? She could recall no instance. This evening the return to absolute cheerfulness dated from the reappearance of Sally after she had changed everything, and made her hair hold up. It lasted through fried soles and a huge fowl—done enough this time—and a bread-and-butter pudding impaired by too many raisins. Through the long end of a game of chess begun by Sally and Dr. Conrad the evening before, and two rubbers of whist, in which everybody else had all the good cards in their hands, as is



the case in that game. And through the visit to Neptune above recorded.

But when, after half-an-hour's chat over the day's events with Rosalind, midnight and an extinguished candle left Fenwick to himself and his pillow in the little room next hers with no door between, which Mrs. Lobjoit's resources dictated, there came back to him first a recollection of his suppressed commonplace about the stone that had vanished for ever in the world of waters ; then a hazy memory of the same thing having happened before and the same remark having been made by himself ; then a sudden jerk of surprise, when, just as he was thinking of sleep, he was able to answer a question Space asked him spontaneously about where this happened, with what would have been, had he been quite awake, words spoken aloud to himself. "That time at Niagara, of course !" And this jerk of surprise left him wide-awake, struggling with an army of revived memories that had come on him suddenly.

He was so thoroughly waked by them that a difficulty he always had of remaining in bed when not asleep dictated a relighted candle and a dressing-gown and slippers. It was akin to his aversion to over-comfortable chairs ; though he acknowledged beds as proper implements of sleep, sleep being granted. And sleep seemed now so completely out of the question, even if there had been no roaring of the gale and no constant thunder of the seas on the beach below, that Fenwick surrendered at discretion, and gave himself up a helpless prisoner in the grasp of his own past.

Not of the whole of it. But of as much as he could face here and now. Another mind that could have commanded some strange insight into the whole of this past, and his power or powerlessness to look it in the face, might have striven to avert its revival. That blow might have been too overwhelming. But there was enough, as we shall see, in the recollection that came back of the decade before his return to England, to make his breath catch and a shudder run through his strong frame as he pressed his palms hard on his eyelids, just as though by so doing he could shut it out.

Thank God Rosey was asleep, or would be soon. He would have time to think how he could tell the story he could not be silent about—that, he felt, might be impossible—and yet keep back one ominous portentous fact that had come to him, as a motive force in his former life, without the details of his

early history that belonged to it. That fact Rosey must never know, even if . . . well!—so many things turned on it. All he could see now—taken by surprise as he was—was that, come what might, that fact should always be kept from *her*. But as to concealing from her his strange experience altogether, that was hardly to be thought of. He would conceal it while he could, though, provisionally.

One o'clock by his watch on the dressing-table under the candle. St. Sennans must have struck unheard. No wonder—in this wind! Surely it had rather increased, if anything. Fenwick paced with noiseless care about the little room; he could not be still. The sustained monotone of wind and sea was only crossed now and then by a sound of fall or breakage, to chronicle some little piece of mischief achieved by the former on land, and raise the latter's hopes of some such success in its turn before the night should end. . . .

Two o'clock by the dressing-table watch, and still the noiseless slippered feet of the sleepless man came and went. Little fear of anyone else hearing him! For the wind seemed to have got up the bit that was predicted of it, and had certainly gone round to the suth'ard. If any sleeper could cling to unconsciousness through the rattle of the windows and the intermittent banging of a spectral door that defied identification—the door that always bangs in storms everywhere—the mere movement of a cautious foot would have no effect. If unable to sleep for the wind, none would be alive to it. It would be lost in the storm. . . .

Three o'clock! Did you, who read this, ever watch through a night with something on your mind you are to be forced to speak of in the morning—a compulsion awaiting you as a lion awaiting the *début* of a reluctant martyr in the arena of the Coliseum? Did you, so watching, feel—not the tedium—but the maddening speed of the hours, the cruelty of the striking clocks? Were you conscious of a grateful reliance on your bedroom door, still closed between you and *your* lion, as the gate that the eager eyes of Rome were fixed on was still a respite from *his*? Fenwick was; keenly conscious. And when on a sudden he heard with a start that a furtive hand was on the old-fashioned door-latch, he, knowing it could be none other than Rosalind, sleepless in the storm, felt that the lion had stolen a march on him, and that he must make up his mind sharp whether he would go for complete confidence or partial reserve. Certainly the latter, of



necessity, said Alacrity. There could be no doubt of it, on her account—for the present, at any rate.

For he had recollected, look you, that at the time of that stone-throw into the rapids above Niagara he was a married man somehow separated from his wife. And the way that he knew this was that he could remember plainly that the reason he did not make an offer of marriage, there by the great torrent that was rushing to the Falls, to a French girl (whose name he got clearly) was that he did not know if his wife was dead or living. He did not know it now. The oddity of it was that, though he remembered clearly this incident hinging on the fact that he was then a married man, he could remember neither the wife he had married nor anything connected with her. He strove hard against this partial insight into his past, which seemed to him stranger than complete oblivion. But he soon convinced himself that a slight hazy vision he conjured up of a wedding years and years ago was only a reflex image—an automatic reaction—from his recent marriage. For did not the wraith of his present wife quietly take its place before the altar where by rights he should have been able to recall her predecessor? It was all confusion; no doubt of it.

But his mind had travelled quickly too; for when Rosalind looked in at his door he knew what he had to say, for her sake.

“Gerry darling, have you never been to bed?”

“For a bit, dearest. Then I found I couldn’t sleep, and got up.”

“Isn’t it awful, the noise? One hears it so in this house. . . . Well, I suppose it’s the same in any house that looks straight over the sea.”

“Haven’t you slept?”

“Oh yes, a little. But then it woke me. Then I thought I heard you moving.”

“So I was. Now, suppose we both go to bed, and try to sleep. I shall have to, because of my candle. Is that all you’ve got left?”

“That’s all, and it’s guttering. And the paper will catch directly.” She blew it out to avoid this, and added: “Stop a minute and I’ll take the paper off, and make it do for a bit.”

“You can have mine. Leave me yours.” For Fenwick’s was, even now, after burning so long, the better candle-end of the two. He took it out of the socket, and slipped its paper roll off, an economy suggested by the condition of its fellow.

But as he did so his own light flashed full on his face, and



Rosalind saw a look on it that scarcely belonged to mere sleeplessness like her own—unrest that comes to most of us when the elements are restless.

“Gerry, you’ve been worrying. You know you have, dear. Speak the truth! You’ve been trying to recollect things.”

“I had nobody here to prevent me, you see.” He made no denial; in fact, thought admission of baffled effort was his safest course. “I get worried and fidgeted by chaotic ideas when you’re not here. But it’s nothing.” Rosalind did not agree to this at all.

“I wish Mrs. Lobjoit could have put us both in one room,” she said.

“Well, *we* didn’t see our way, you know,” he replied, referring to past councils on sleeping arrangements. “It’s only for a week, after all.”

“Yes, darling; but a week’s a week, and I can’t have you worried to death.” She made him lie down again, and sat by him, holding his hand. So unnerved was he by his glance back into his past, so long unknown to him, and so sweet was the comfort of her presence and the touch of her living hand after all those hours of perturbation alone, that Fenwick made no protest against her remaining beside him. But a passiveness that would have belonged to an invalid or a sluggish temperament seemed unlike the strong man Rosalind knew him for, and she guessed from it that there was more behind. Still, she said nothing, and sat on with his hand grasping hers and finding in it his refuge from himself. To her its warm pressure was a sure sign that his memory had not penetrated the darkness of his earlier time. If God willed, it might never do so. Meanwhile, what was there for it but patience?

As she sat there listening to the roaring of the gale outside, and watching with satisfaction the evident coming of sleep, she said to herself that it might easily be that some new thing had come back to him which he would be unwilling she should know about, at least until his own mind was clearer. He might speak with less reserve to Vereker. She would give the doctor leave to talk to him to-morrow. Fear of what she would hear may have influenced her in this.

So when, sooner than she had expected, she caught the sound of the first breath of indisputable sleep, she rose and slipped away quietly, and as she lay down again to rest again asked herself the question: Was it the galvanism that had done it?

## CHAPTER XXXVI

"WE thought it best to let you have your sleep out, dear. Sally agreed. No, leave the pot alone. Mrs. Lobjoit will make some fresh coffee."

"Who's the other cup?"

"Vereker. He came in to breakfast; to see if we were blown away."

"I see. Of course. Where are they now?"

"They? . . . oh, him and Sally! They said they'd go and see if Tishy and her husband were blown away."

"Well, I have had my sleep out with a vengeance. It's a quarter to ten."

"Never mind, darling. So much the better. Let's have a look at you. . . ." And the little self-explanatory colloquy ends with Rosalind kissing her husband and examining him with anxious eyes. She sees a face less haggard than the one she saw last night, for is it not daylight and has not the wind fallen to a mere cheerful breeze you can quite stand upright in, leaning slightly seawards? And are not the voices and the footsteps of a new day outside, and the swift exchanges of sunlight and cloud-shadow that are chasing each other off the British Channel? And has not a native of eighty years of age (which he ignores) just opened the street door on his own responsibility and shouted along the passage that pra'ans are large this morning. He is more an institution than a man, and is freely spoken of as "The Shrimps." A flavour of a Triton who has got too dry on the beach comes in with the sea air, and also a sense of prawns, emptied from a wooden measure they have been honourably shaken down into, falling on a dish held out to receive them by an ambassador of four, named by Sally little Miss Lobjoit, the youngest of her race.

But for all that the rising life of the hours and the subsiding

gale may do to chase away the memory of the oppressions of the night from one who was defenceless in its solitude, Rosalind can see how much they leave behind. Her husband may do his best to make light of it—to laugh it off as nothing but the common bad night we all know so well; may make the most of the noises of the storm, and that abominable banging door; but he will not conceal from her the effort that it costs him to do so. Besides, had he not admitted, in the night, that he “got worried and fidgeted by chaotic ideas.” What were these ideas? How far had he penetrated into his own past? She was not sorry for the few words she had had time to exchange with Dr. Conrad while Sally went to seek her hat. She had renewed and confirmed her permission to him to speak to her husband freely about himself.

“Are Mr. and Mrs. Paganini gone to sea?” This is said as Fenwick opens negotiations rather mechanically with the fresh coffee Mrs. Lobjoit has produced, and as that lady constructs for removal a conglomerate of plates and effete eggs.

“Gone to sea, Gerry? Not very likely. What’s the meaning of that? Explain.”

“Why, Sally and her doctor are staring out at the offing. . . .”

“Well?”

“And didn’t you say they had gone to find out if they were blown away?”

“I supposed they changed their minds.” Rosalind talks absently, as if they didn’t matter. All her thoughts are on her husband. But she doesn’t fancy catechising him about his experiences in the night, neither. She had better let him alone, and await new oblivion or a healthy revival.

He is also *distracted*, and when he spoke of Sally and the doctor he had shown no interest in his own words. His eyes do not kindle at hers in his old way, and might be seeing nothing, for all there is in them to tell of it. He makes very short work of a cup of coffee, and a mere pretence of anything else; and then, suddenly rousing himself with a shake, says this won’t do, and he must go out and get a blow. All right, says Rosalind, and he’d better get Dr. Conrad, and make him go for a walk. Only they are not to fall over the cliff.

“Fall over the cliff!” repeats Fenwick. He laughs, and she is glad at the sound. “You couldn’t fall over the cliff against such a wind as this. I defy anyone to.” He kisses her and goes



out, and she hears him singing, as he hunts for a stick that has vanished, an old French song :

“Auprès de ma blond-e  
Comme c'est bon—c'est bon--c'est bon. . . .”

Only, when he has found the stick and his hat, he does not go at once, but comes back, and says, as he kisses her again : “Don't fidget about me, darling ; I'm all right.” Which must have been entirely brain-wave or thought-reading, as Rosalind had said never a word of her anxiety, so far.

Fenwick walked away briskly towards the flagstaff where Sally and Vereker had been looking out to sea. In the dazzling sunshine—all the more dazzling for the suddenness of its come and go—and the intoxicating rush of well-washed air that each of those crested waves out yonder knew so much about—and they were all of a tale—and such a companion in the enjoyment of it as that white sea-bird afloat against the blue gap of sky or purple underworld of cloud, what could he do other than cast away the thoughts the night had left, the cares, whatever they were, that the revival of memory had brought back ?

If he could not succeed altogether in putting them aside, at least he could see his way to bearing them better, with the kiss of his wife still on his face, and all St. Sennans about him in the sunshine, and Sally to come. However, before he reached the flagstaff he met the doctor, and heard that Miss Sally had actually gone down to the machines to see if Gabriel wouldn't put one down near the water, so that she could run a little way. She was certain she could swim in that sea if she could once get through what she called the selvage-wave. If Gabriel wouldn't, she should take her things up to the house and put them on and walk down to the sea in a cloak. It was quite ridiculous, said the merpussy, people making such a fuss about a few waves. What was the world coming to ?

“She'll be all safe,” was Fenwick's comment when he heard this. “They won't let her go in, at the machines. They won't let her have the Turkey-twill knickers and the short skirt. She always leaves them there to dry. *She's* all right. Let's take a turn across the fields ; it's too windy for the cliff.”

“You had a bad night, Fenwick.”

“All of us had. About three in the morning I thought the house would blow down. And there was a door banged, etc. . . .”

“You had a worse night than the rest of us. Look at me

straight in the face. No, I wasn't going to say show me your tongue." They had stopped a moment at the top of what was known as The Steps—*par excellence*—which was the shortest cut up to the field-path. Dr. Conrad looks a second or so, and then goes on: "I thought so. You've got black lines under your eyes, and you're evidently conscious of the lids. I expect you've got a pain in them, one in each, tied together by a string across here." That is to say, from eyebrow to eyebrow, as illustrated fingerwise.

Fenwick wasn't prepared to deny it evidently. He drew his own fingers across his forehead, as though to feel if the pain were really there. It confirmed a suspicion he couldn't have sworn to.

"Yes; I suppose I did have a worse night than the rest of you. At least, I hope so, for your sakes." His manner might have seemed to warrant immediate speculation or inquiry about the cause of his sleeplessness, but Vereker walked on beside him in silence. The way was along a short, frustrated street that led to the field-pathway that was grass-grown, more or less, all but the heaps of flints that were one day to make a new top-dressing, but had been forgotten by the local board, and the premature curb-stones whose anticipations about traffic had never been fulfilled. The little detached houses on either side were unselfish little houses, that only wanted to be useful and afford shelter to the wanderer, or provide a refuge for old age. All made use, on placards, of the cautious expression "Apartments"; while some flung all reserve to the winds and said also they were "To let" outright. The least satisfactory one of the lot was almost invisible owing to its egotism but distinguishable from afar because the cross-board on a standard that had been placed in the garden-front had fallen forward over the palings like Punch's gallows. It didn't much matter, because the placard attached was dissolving off in the rains, and hanging down so low that a goat was eating it with relish, standing against the parapet of the garden-fence.

They reached the point at which Albion Villas had been thwarted by a hedge, rich in unripe sloes and green abortive blackberries, in their attempt to get across a stubble-field to the new town, and passed in instalments through its turnstile, or kissing-gate. Neither spoke, except that Fenwick said, "Look at the goat," until, after they had turned on to the chalk pathway, nearly dry in the warm sun and wind, he added a question:

"Did you ever taste a sloe?"



"Yes, once."

"That is what every one says if you ask him if he ever tasted a sloe. Nobody ever does it again."

"But they make sloe-gin of them?"

"That, my dear Vereker, is what everybody always says next. Sally told me they did, and she's right. They console themselves for the taste of the sloe by an imaginary *liqueur* like *maraschino*. But that's because they never tasted sloe-gin."

Vereker thinks he may conclude that Fenwick is talking for talk's sake, and humours him. He can get to the memory-subject later.

"A patient of mine," he says, "who's been living at Spezzia, was telling me about a fruit that was very good there, *diosperi* he called them. They must be very unlike sloes by his description."

"And naturally sloes made you think of them. I wonder what they are—*diosperi*—*diosperi*——" He repeated the word as though trying to recall it. Dr. Conrad helped the identification.

"He said they are what the Japs call jelly-plums—great big fruit, very juicy."

"I know. They're persimmons, or a sort of persimmons. We used to get lots of them in California, and even up at the Klondyke...."

He stopped abruptly and remained silent. A sudden change in him was too marked to escape notice, and there could be no doubt about the cause. The doctor walked beside him, also silent, for a few paces. Then he spoke :

"You will have to bear this, Fenwick, and keep your head. It is just as I told you it would be. It is all coming back." He laid his left hand on his companion's shoulder as they stood side-by-side on the chalk pathway, and with his right felt the wrist that was nearest him. Fenwick was in a quiver all through his frame, and his pulse was beating furiously as Dr. Conrad's finger touched it. But he spoke with self-control, and his step was steady as they walked on slowly together the moment after.

"It is all coming back. It *has* come back. I shall remember all in time." Then he repeated Vereker's words, "I must keep my head. I shall have to bear this," and walked on again in silence. The young man beside him still felt he had best not speak yet. Just let the physical perturbation subside. Talking would only make it worse.



They may have walked so for two minutes before Fenwick spoke again. Then he roused himself, to say, with but little hint in his voice of any sense of the oddity of his question: "Which is my dream?—this or the other?" Then added: "That's the question I want to ask, and nobody can answer."

"And of course all the while each of us knows perfectly well the answer is simply 'Neither.' You are a man that has had an accident, and lost his memory. Be patient, and do not torment yourself. Let it take its own time."

"All right, doctor! Patience is the word." He spoke in an undertone—a voice of acquiescence, or rather obedience. "Perhaps it will not be so bad when I remember more." They walked on again.

Then Vereker, noting that during silence he brooded under the oppression of what he had already recovered from the past, and to all appearance struck, once or twice, on some new unwelcome vein of thought, judging from a start or a momentary tension of the arm that now held his, decided that it would be as well to speak to him now, and delay no longer.

"Has anything come back to you, so far, that will unsettle your present life?"

"No, no—not that, thank God! Not so far as I can see. But much that must disquiet it; it cannot be otherwise."

"Do you mind telling me?"

"No, surely, dear fellow!—surely I will tell you. Why should I not? But what I say to you don't repeat to Sally or her mother. Not just now, you know. Wait!"

There was a recess in the wall of mortar-bedded flints that ran along the path, which would give shelter from the wind to light a cigar. Fenwick stopped and took two from a cigar-case, Sally's present to him last Christmas, and offered one to Dr. Conrad, who, however, didn't want to smoke so early. He lighted his own in the recess, with only a slight tremor of the hand, barely visible even to Vereker's experienced eye; and then, as he threw away the match, said, without anything that could be called emotion, though always with an apparent sense of his bewilderment at his own words:

"I am that man Harrisson that was in all the newspapers just about the time of the—you remember—when I . . ."

Vereker failed for the moment to grasp the degree of his own astonishment, and used the residuum of his previous calmness to say:

"I remember. The time of your accident."

"*Am* I that man? I mean ought I to say '*I am* that man?' I know I *was* that man, in my old dream. I know it now, in this one."

"Well, but—so much the better! You are a millionaire, Fenwick, with mines at Klondyke. . . ."

Dr. Conrad had been so taken aback at the suddenness of the extraordinary revelation that his amazement was quite at a loss for means of expression. A delayed laugh, not unmixed with a gasp, expressed nothing—merely recorded a welcome to the good side of it. For, of course, when one hears of Golconda one is bound to think it good, failing evidence to the contrary.

"Yes, I *was* that man—Algernon Harrisson. Now, the question is—and you'll have to help me here, Vereker. Don't look so thunderstruck, old chap—Shall I be that man again or not?"

"Why not, in Heaven's name? How can you help it?" The speaker is too dumbfounded, so far, to be able to get the whip hand of the circumstances. But the pace may be slacker presently.

"Let's be steady!" Fenwick's voice, as he says this, has a sense of ease in it, as though he were relieved by his disclosure. He takes Vereker's arm in his again, and as they walk on together is evidently on good terms with his cigar—so the doctor thinks—and the tremor has gone from his hands. A short pause, and he goes on speaking: "Until we pitched on the Klondyke just now I knew nothing of this. I shall get it all back in time. Let me see! . . ."

The doctor recovered his presence of mind. "Stop a minute," said he. "Do you know, Fenwick, if I were you I shouldn't try to tell anything until you're clearer about the whole thing. Don't talk to me now. Wait till you are in a state to know how much you wish to tell." But Fenwick would have none of this. He shook his head decidedly.

"I *must* talk to some one about it. And my wife I cannot. . . ."

"Why not?"

"You will see. You need not be frightened of too many confidences. I haven't recollected any grave misdemeanours yet. I'll keep them to myself when they come. Now listen to what I can and do recollect pretty clearly." He paused a second, as if his first item was shaky; then said, "Yes!—of course." And went on as though the point were cleared up.

“Of course! I went up to the Klondyke almost in the first rush, in '97. I'll tell you all about that after. Others besides myself became enormously rich that summer, but I was one of the luckiest. However, I don't want to tell you about Harrison at Klondyke—(that's how I find it easiest to think of myself, third person singular!)—but to get at the thing in the dream, that concerns me most *now*. Listen! . . . Only remember this, Vereker dear! I can only recall jagged fragments yet awhile. I have been stunned, and can't help that. . . .” He stopped the doctor, who was about to speak, with: “I know what you are going to say: let it stand over a bit—wait and be patient—all that sort of game! All very good and sensible, but I *can't*!”

“Can't?”

“No! Can't—simply *can't*. Because, look you! One of the things that has come back is that I am a married man—by which I mean that Harrison was. Oh dear! It *is* such an ease to me to think of Harrison as somebody else. You can't understand that.” But Vereker is thoroughly discomposed.

“But didn't you say—only just now—there was nothing—*nothing*—to unsettle your present life? No; I can't understand—I *can't* understand.” His reply is to Fenwick's words, but the reference is to the early part of his speech.

“You will understand it better if I tell you more. Let me do it my own way, because I get mixed, and feel as if I might lose the clue any moment. All the time I was with the Clemenceaux at Ontario I was a married man—I mean that I *knew* I was a married man. And I remember knowing it all that time. Indeed, I did! But if you ask me who my wife was—she wasn't there, you know; you've got all that clear?—why, I can't tell you any more than Adam! All I know is that all that time little Ernestine was growing from a girl to a woman, the reason I felt there could be no misunderstanding on that score was that Clemenceau and his wife knew quite well I had been married and divorced or something—there was something rum, long before—and you know Papists would rather the Devil outright than have their daughter marry a divorced man. But as to who the wife had been, and what it was all about. . . .”

He stopped again suddenly, seizing Vereker by the arm with a strong hand that trembled as it had done before. His face went very white, but he kept self-possession, as it were mechanically; so completely that the long ash on his half-smoked cigar



remained unbroken. He waited a moment, and then spoke in a controlled way.

"I can remember nothing of the story ; or what seems to come I *know* is only confusion . . . by things in it . . ." Vereker thought it might be well to change the current of his thoughts.

"Who were the Clemenceaux at Ontario ?" said he.

"Of course, I ought to tell you that. Only there were so many things. Clemenceau was a jeweller at Ontario. I lived in the flat over his shop, and used to see a great deal of his family. I must have lived almost entirely among French Canadians while I was there—it was quite three or four years. . . ."

"And all that time, Fenwick, you thought of yourself as a married man ?"

"Married or divorced—yes. And long before that."

"It is quite impossible for me—you must see it—to form any picture in my mind of how the thing presents itself to you."

"Quite."

"It seems—to me—perfectly incredible that you should have no recollection at all of the marriage, or divorce, or whatever it was. . . ."

"I did not say I had no recollection *at all*. Listen. Don't you know this, Vereker ?—of course you do, though—how one wakes from a hideous dream and remembers exactly the feeling it produced, and how the same feeling comes back when one recalls from the dream some fragment preserved from all one has forgotten of it—something nowise horrible in itself, but from its associations in the dream ?"

"Oh yes, perfectly !"

"Well—that's my case. When I try to bring back the memories I know I *must* have had at that time in Canada, nothing comes back but a horror—something like a story read in boyhood and shuddered at in the night—but all details gone. I mean all details with horror in them. Because, do you know ? . . ."

"Yes—— ?" Vereker stopped beside him on the path, as Fenwick stopped and hesitated. Utter perplexity almost forbidding speech was the impression the doctor received of his condition at this moment. After a moment's silence he continued :

"You will hardly believe me, but almost the only thing I can revive—that is, have revived so far—is an occurrence that must needs at the time have been a happiness and a delight. And yet it now presents itself to me as an excruciating torment—as part

of some tragedy in which I had to be an actor, but of which I can seize no detail that does not at once vanish, leaving mere pain and confusion.”

“What was it? You don’t mind . . . ?”

“Mind telling you? Oh no!—why should I? I may be happier if I can tell it. It’s like this. I am at a railway-station in the heat somewhere, and am expecting a girl who is coming to marry me. I can remember the heat and our meeting, and then all is Chaos again. Then, instead of remembering more, I go over and over again the old thing as at first. . . . No! nothing new presents itself. Only the railway-station and the palm-trees in the heat. And the train coming slowly in, and my knowing that she is in it, and coming to marry me.”

“Do you mean that the vision—or scene—in your mind stops dead, and you don’t see her get out of the carriage?”

They had walked on slowly again a short distance. Fenwick made another halt, and as he flicked away a most successful crop of cigar-ash that he had been cultivating—so it struck Vereker—as a kind of gauge or test of his own self-control, he answered:

“I couldn’t say that. Hardly! I see a girl or woman get out of the carriage, but *not her*. . . .!”

Vereker was completely at a loss—began to be a little afraid his companion’s brain might be giving way. “How *can* you tell that,” said he, “unless you know who she ought to have been?”

Fenwick resumed his walk, and when he replied did so in a voice that had less tension in it, as though something less painful had touched his mind:

“It’s rum, I grant you. But the whole thing is too rum to bear thinking of—at least, to bear talking about. As to the exact reason *why* I know it’s not her, that’s simple enough!”

“What is it?”

“Because Mrs. Fenwick gets out of the train—my Rosey, here, Sally’s mother. And it’s just the same with the only other approach to a memory that connects itself with it—a shadowy, indistinct ceremony, also in the heat, much more indistinct than the railway-station. My real wife’s image—Rosey’s, here—just takes the place at the altar where the other one should be, and prevents my getting at any recollection of her. It is the only thing that makes the dream bearable.”

Vereker said nothing. He did not want to disturb any lull

in the storm in his companion's mind. After a slight pause the latter continued :

"The way I account for it seems to me sufficient. I cannot conceive any woman being to me what . . . or, perhaps I should express it better by saying I cannot connect the *wife-idea* with any image except hers. And, of course, the strong dominant idea displaces the feeble memory."

Vereker was ready with an unqualified assent at the moment. For though Sally, as we have seen, had taken him into her confidence the day after her mother's wedding—and, indeed, had talked over the matter many times with him since—the actual truth was far too strange to suggest itself offhand, as it would have been doing had the doctor connected the fact that Sally's mother went out to India to be married with this meeting of two lovers at a simmering railway-station, name not known. The idea of the *impossible per se* is probably the one a finite intelligence most readily admits, and is always cordially welcome in intellectual difficulties—a universal resolution of logical discords. In the case of these two men, at that moment, neither was capable of knowing the actual truth had he been told it, whatever the evidence ; still less of catching at slight connecting-links. Fenwick went on speaking :

"I don't know whether you will understand it—yes ! I think, perhaps, you might—that it's a consolation to me this way Mrs. Fenwick comes in. It seems to bring fresh air into what else would be—ugh !" He shuddered a half-intentional shudder ; then, dropping his voice, went on, speaking quickly : "The thing makes part of some tragedy—some sad story—something best forgotten ! If I could only dare to hope I might remember no more—might even forget it altogether."

"Perhaps if you could remember the whole the painfulness might disappear. Does not anything in the image of the railway-station give a clue to its whereabouts ?"

"No. It hardly amounts to an image at all—more a fact than an image. But the heat was a fact. And the dresses were all white—thin—tropical. . . ."

"Then the Mrs. Fenwick that comes out of the train isn't dressed as she dresses here ?"

"Why, n-n-no ! . . . No, certainly not. But that's natural, you know. Of course, my mind supplies a dress for the heat."

"It doesn't diminish the puzzlement."

"Yes—yes—but it does, though. Because, look here ! It's



not the *only* thing. I find myself consciously making Rosey look *younger*. I can't help my mind—my *now* mind—working, do what I will ! But as to where it was, I fancy I have a clue. I can remember remembering—if you understand me—that I had been in Australia—remembered it at Ontario—talked about it to Tina Clemenceau. . . .”

If Vereker had had any tendency to get on a true scent at this point, the reference to Australia would have thrown him off it. And the thought of the Canadian girl took Fenwick's mind once more to his American life : “ It was my thinking of that girl made all this come back to me, you know. Just after you left us, when we were throwing stones in the sea, last night. . . .”

“ Throwing stones in the sea ? . . .”

“ Yes—we went down to the waves on the beach, and my throwing a stone in reminded me of it all, after. I was just going to get to sleep, when, all of a sudden, what must I think of but Niagara!—at least, the rapids. I was standing with Mademoiselle Tina—no one else—on a rock overlooking the great torrent, and I threw a stone in, and she said no one would ever see that stone again. I said, ‘ Like a man when he dies and is forgotten,’ or something of that sort. I recollect her now—poor child!—turning her eyes full on me and saying, ‘ But I should not forget you, Mr. Harrisson.’ You see how it was ? Only it seems a sort of disloyalty to the poor girl to tell it. It was all plain, and she meant it to be. I can't remember now whether I said, ‘ I can't marry you, Tina, because I don't know that my wife is dead,’ or whether I only thought it. But I know that I then knew I was, or had been, married and divorced or deserted. And it was that unhappy stone that brought it all back to me.”

“ Are you sure of that ?”

“ Quite sure that began it. I was just off, and some outlying scrap of my mind was behindhand, and that stone saw it and pounced on it. I remembered more after that. I know I was rather glad to start off to the new gold river, because of Ernestine Clemenceau. I don't think I should have cared to marry Ernestine. Anyhow, I didn't. She seems to me Harrisson's affair now. Don't laugh at me, doctor !”

“ I wasn't laughing.” And, indeed, this was true. The doctor was very far from laughing.

They had walked some little way inland, keeping along a road sunk in the chalk. This now emerged on an exposed hill-side, swept by the sea wind ; which, though abated, still made talk

less easy than in the sheltered trench, or behind the long wall where Fenwick lit his cigar. Vereker suggested turning back; and, accordingly, they turned. The doctor found time to make up his mind that no harm could be done now by referring to his interview with Rosalind, the day before.

"Your wife told me yesterday that you had just had a tiresome recurrence when you came out after us—at the jetty-end, you know."

"Surely! So I had. Did she tell you what it was?" Evidently, in the stress and turmoil of his subsequent experience in the night, it had slipped from him. The doctor said a reminding word or two, and it came back.

"I know, I know. I've got it now. That was last night. But now—that again! *Why* was it so horrible? That was dear old Kreutzkammer, at 'Frisco. What could there be horrible about *him*?..." A clear idea shot into the doctor's mind—not a bad thing to work on.

"Fenwick!—don't you see how it is? These things are only horrible to you *because* you half recollect them. The pain is only the baffled strain on the memory, not the thing you are trying to recover."

"Very likely." He assents, but his mind is dwelling on Kreutzkammer, evidently. For he breaks into a really cheerful laugh, pleasant in the ears of his companion. "Why, *that* was Diedrich Kreutzkammer!" he exclaims, "up at that Swiss place. And I didn't know him from Adam!"

"Of course it was. But look here, Fenwick—isn't what I say true? Half the things that come back to you will be no pain at all when you have fairly got hold of them. Only, *wait*! Don't struggle to remember, but let them come."

"All right, old chap! I'll be good." But he has no very strong convictions on the subject, clearly. The two walk on together in silence as far as the low flint wall, in another recess of which Fenwick lights another cigar, as before. Then he turns to the doctor and says:

"Not a word of this to Rosey—nor to Sallykin!" The doctor seems perplexed, but assents and promises. "Honest Injun!—as Sally says," adds Fenwick. And the doctor repeats that affidavit, and then says:

"I shall have to finesse a good deal. I can manage with Mrs. Fenwick. But—I wish I felt equally secure with Miss Sally." He feels very insecure indeed in that quarter, if the truth is

told. And he is afflicted with a double embarrassment here, as he has never left Sally without her "miss" in speaking to Fenwick, while, on the other hand, he holds a definite licence from her mother—is, as it were, a chartered libertine. But that's a small matter, after all. The real trouble is having to look Sally in the face and conceal anything.

"Miss who?" says Fenwick. "Oh—Sally, you mean! Of course she'll rush the position. Trust her!" He can't help laughing as he thinks of Sally, with Dr. Conrad vainly trying to protect his outworks.

The momentary hesitation about how to speak of Sally may have something to do with Vereker's giving the conversation a twist. It turns, however, on a point that has been waiting in his mind all through their interview, ever since Fenwick spoke of his identity with Harrisson.

"Look here, Fenwick," he says. "It's all very fine your talking about keeping Mrs. Fenwick in the dark about this. I know it's for her own sake—but you can't."

"And why not? I can't have Rosey know I have another wife living...."

"You don't know she's alive, for one thing!"

"H'm!... I don't *know*, certainly. But I should have known, somehow, if she were dead. Of course, if further memory or inquiry proves that she *is* dead, that's another matter."

"But, in the meanwhile, how can you prove your identity with Harrisson and claim all your property without her knowing?... What I mean is, I can't think it out. There may be a way...."

"My dear boy"—Fenwick says this very quietly—"that's exactly the reason why I said you would have to help me to settle whether I should be that man again or not. I say *not*, if the decision lies with me."

"Not?—not *at all*?" The doctor fairly gasps; his breath is taken away. Never perhaps was a young man freer from thought and influence of money than he, more absorbed in professional study and untainted by the supremacies of property. But for all that he was human, and English, and theoretically accepted gold as the thing of things, the one great aim and measure of success. Of other men's success, that is, and *their* aim, not his. For he was, in his own eyes, a humble plodder, not in the swim at all. But he ascribed to the huge sums real people had a right to, outside the limits of the likes of him, a kind of



sacredness that grew in a geometrical ratio with their increase. It gave him much more pain to hear that a safe had been robbed of thousands in gold than he felt when, on opening a wrapped-up fee, what seemed a guinea to the touch turned out a new farthing and a shilling to the sight. It was in the air that he lived in—that all of us live in.

So, when Fenwick made in this placid way a choice of conduct that must needs involve the sacrifice of sums large enough to be spoken of with awe, even in the sacred precincts of a bank, poor Dr. Conrad felt that all his powers of counsel had been out-shot, and that his mind was reeling on its pedestal. That a poor man should give up his savings *en bloc* to help a friend would have seemed to him natural and reasonable ; that he should do so for honest love of a woman still more so ; but that a millionaire should renounce his millions ! Was it decent ? was it proper ? was it considerate to Mammon ? But that must have been Fenwick's meaning, too. The doctor did not recover his speech before Fenwick spoke again :

“Why should I claim all my property ? How should I be the gainer if it made Rosey unhappy ?”

“I see. I quite see. I feel with you, you know ; feel as you do. But what will become of the money ?”

“The poor darling money ? Just think ! It will lie neglected at the bank, unclaimed, forsaken, doing no more mischief than when it was harmless dust and nuggets in the sand of the Klondyke. While it was there, gold was a bit—a mighty small bit—dearer than it has become since. Now that it is in the keeping of chaps who won't give it up half as easily as the Klondyke did, I suppose it has appreciated again, as the saying is. The difference of cost between getting it out of the ground and out of the bank is a negligible factor....” Fenwick seemed to find ease in chatting economics in this way. Some of it was so obviously true to Vereker that he at once concluded it would be classed among fallacies ; he had had experience of this sort of thing. But he paid little attention, as he was thinking of how much of this interview he could repeat to Sally, to whom every step they took brought him nearer. The roar of a lion in his path was every moment more audible to the ears of his imagination. And it left him silent ; but Fenwick went on speaking :

“We won't trouble about the darling dust and nuggets ; let them lie in pawn, and wait for a claimant. They won't find Mr. Harrisson's heir-at-law in a hurry. If ever proof comes of

the death of Mrs. Harrisson—whoever she was—I'll be Mr. Harrisson again. Till then. . . ."

"Till then what?"

"Till then, Vereker dear"—Fenwick said this very seriously, with emphasis—"till then we shall do most wisely to say nothing further to Mrs. Fenwick or to Sally. You must see that it won't be possible to pick and choose, to tell this and reserve that. I shall speak of the recurrences of memory that come to me, as too confused for repetition. I shall tell lies about them if I think it politic. Because I can't have Rosey made miserable on any terms. As for the chick, you'll have to manage the best you can."

"I'll do my best," the doctor says, without a particle of confidence in his voice. "But about yourself, Fenwick?"

"I shall do very well, as long as I can have a chat with you now and again. You've no idea what a lot of good it has done me, this talking to you. And, of course, I haven't told you one-tenth of the things I remember. There was one thing I wanted to say though just now, and we got off the line—what was it now? Oh, I know, about my name. It wasn't really Harrisson."

"Not really Harrisson? What was it then?" What next, and next?—is the import of the speaker's face.

"I'll be hanged if I know! But it's true, rum as it seems. I know I knew it wasn't Harrisson every time I signed a cheque in America. But as for what it *was*, that all belongs to the dim time before. Isn't that them coming to meet us?"

Yes, it was. And there was something else also the doctor had had it on his tongue to say, and it had got away on a siding. But it didn't matter—it was only about whether the return of memory had or had not been due to the galvanic battery on the pier.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

“ You never mean to say you’ve been in the water ? ”

It was quite clear, from the bluish finger-tips of the gloveless merpussy—for at St. Sennans sixes are not *de rigueur* in the morning—that she *has* been in, and has only just come out. But Fenwick, who asked the question, grasped a handful of loose black hair for confirmation, and found it wet.

“ Haven’t I ? ” says the incorrigible one. “ And you should have heard the rumpus over getting a machine down.”

“ She’s a selfish little monkey,” her mother says, but forgivingly, too. “ She’ll drown herself, and not care a penny about all the trouble she gives.” You see, Rosalind wouldn’t throw her words into this callous form if she was really thinking about the merpussy. But just now she is too anxious about Gerry to be very particular.

What has passed between him and Dr. Conrad ? What does the latter know now more than she does herself ? She falls back with him, and allows the other two to go on in front. Obviously the most natural arrangement.

“ What has he told you, Dr. Conrad ? ” This is not unexpected, and the answer is a prepared one, preconcerted under pressure between the doctor and his conscience.

“ I am going to ask you, Mrs. Fenwick, to do me a very great kindness—don’t say yes without hearing what it is—to ask you to allow me to keep back all your husband says to me, and to take for granted that he repeats to you all he feels certain of himself in his own recollections.”

“ He *has* told you more ? ”

“ Yes, he has. But I am far from certain that anything he has said can be relied upon—in his present state. Anyway, I should be very sorry to take upon myself the responsibility of repeating it.”

“ He wishes you not to do so ? ”



"I think so. I should say so. Do you mind?"

"I won't press you to repeat anything you wish to keep back. But is his mind easier? After all, that's the main point."

"That is my impression—much easier." He felt he was quite warranted in saying this. "And I should say that if he does not himself tell you again whatever he has been saying to me, it will only show how uncertain and untrustworthy all his present recollections are. I cannot tell you how strongly I feel that the best course is to leave his mind to its own natural development. It may even be that the partial and distorted images of events such as he has been speaking of to me . . ."

"I mustn't ask you what they were? . . . Yes, go on."

"May again become dim and disappear altogether. If they are to do so, nothing can be gained by dwelling on them now—still less by trying to verify them—and least of all by using them as a stimulus to further recollection."

"You think I had better not ask him questions?"

"Exactly. Leave him to himself. Keep his mind on other matters—healthy occupations, surrounding life. I am certain of one thing—that the effort to disinter the past is painful to him in itself, quite independent of any painful associations in what he is endeavouring to recall."

"I have seen that, too, in the slight recurrences he has had when I was there. I quite agree with you about the best course to pursue. Let us have patience and wait."

Of course, Vereker had not the remotest conception that the less Fenwick remembered, the better his wife would be pleased. So the principal idea in his mind at that moment was, what a very sensible as well as handsome woman he was talking to! It was the way in which most people catalogued Rosalind Fenwick. But her ready assent to his wishes had intensified the doctor's first item of description. A subordinate wave of his thought created an image of the girl Fenwick must have pictured to himself coming out of the railway carriage. He only repeated: "Let us have patience, and wait," with a feeling of relief from possible further catechism.

But in order to avoid showing his wish to abate inquiry, he could talk about aspects of the case that would not involve it. He could tell of analogous cases well known, or in his own practice. For instance, that of a Frenchwoman who wandered away from Amiens, unconscious of her past and her identity, and somehow

got to Buda-Pesth. There, having retained perfect powers of using her mother-tongue, and also speaking German fluently, she had all but got a good teachership in a school, only she had no certificate of character. With a great effort she recalled the name of a lady at Amiens she felt she could write to for one, and did so. "Fancy her husband's amazement," said Dr. Conrad, "when, on opening a letter addressed to his wife in her own handwriting, he found it was an application from Fraulein Schmidt, or some German name, asking for a testimonial!" He referred also to the many cases of the caprices of memory he had met with in his studies of the *petit-mal* of epilepsy, a subject to which he had given special attention. It may have crossed his mind that his companion had fallen very thoroughly in with his views about not dissecting her husband's case overmuch for the present. But he put it down, if it did, to her strong common-sense. It is rather a singular thing how very ready men are to ascribe this quality—whatever it is—to a beautiful woman. Especially if she agrees with them.

Nevertheless the doctor was not very sorry when he saw that Sally and Fenwick, on in front, had caught up with—or been caught up with by—a mixed party, of a sort to suspend, divert, or cancel all conversation of a continuous sort. Miss Gwendolen Arkwright and her next eldest sister had established themselves on Fenwick's shoulders, and the Julius Bradshaws had just intersected them from a side-alley. The latter were on the point of extinction; going back to London by the 3.15, and everything packed but what they had on. It was a clear reprieve, till 3.15 at any rate.

There could be no doubt, thought Rosalind to herself, that her husband's conversation with Vereker had made him easier in his mind than when she saw him last, just after breakfast. No doubt he was all the better, too, for the merpussy's account of her exploit on the beach; of how she managed to overrule old Gabriel and get a machine put down, contrary to precedent, common caution, and public opinion—even in the face of urgent remonstrance from her Swiss acquaintance, almost as good a swimmer as herself; how she had picked out a good big selvage-wave to pop in under, and when she got beyond it enjoyed all the comfort incidental to being in bed with the door locked. Because, you see, she exaggerated. However, one thing she said was quite true. There were no breakers out beyond the said selvage-wave, because the wind had fallen a great deal, and



seemed to have given up the idea of making any more white foam-crests for the present. But there would be more wind again in the night, said authority. It was only a half-holiday for Neptune.

Sally's bracing influence was all the stronger from the fact of her complete unconsciousness of anything unusual. Her mother had said nothing to her the day before of the revival of Baron Kreutzkammer, nor had Dr. Conrad, acting under cautions given. And all Sally knew of the wakeful night was that her mother had found Fenwick walking about, unable to sleep, and had said at breakfast he might just as well have his sleep out now. To which she had agreed, and had then gone away to see if "the Tishies," as she called them, were blown away, and had met the doctor coming to see if *she* was. So she was in the best of moods as an antidote to mind-cloudage. And Fenwick, under the remedy, seemed to her no more unlike himself than was to be expected after not a wink till near daylight. The object of this prolixity is that it may be borne in mind that Sally never shared her mother's or her undeclared lover's knowledge of the strange mental revival caused—as seemed most probable—by the action of the galvanic battery on the previous day.

Vereker walked back to his Octopus, whom he had forsaken for an unusually long time, with his brain in a whirl at the strange revelation he had just heard. His medical experience had put him well on his guard anent one possibility—that the whole thing might be delusion on Fenwick's part. How could such an imperfect memory-record be said to prove anything without confirmation from without?

His habits of thought had qualified him to keep this possibility provisionally in the background without forgetting it. There was nothing in the mere knowledge of its existence to prevent his trying to recall all he could of the story of the disappearance of Harrisson, as he read it in the newspapers a year and a half ago. There had been a deal of talk about it at the time, and great efforts had been made to trace Harrisson, but without success. The doctor lingered a little on his way, conscious that he could recall very little of the Harrisson case, but too interested to be able to leave his recollections dormant until he should get substantial information. The Octopus could recollect all about it no doubt, but how venture to apply to her? Or how



to Sally ? Though, truly, had he done so, it would have been with much less hope of a result. Neither Sally nor her mother were treasure-houses of the day's gossip, as *his* mother was. "We must have taken mighty little notice of what was going on in the world at the time," so thought the doctor to himself.

What *did* he actually recollect ? A paragraph headed "Disappearance of a Millionaire" in a hurried perusal of an evening paper as he rode to an urgent case ; a repetition—several repetitions—on the newspaper posters of the name *Harrisson* during the fortnight following, chiefly disclosing supposed discoveries of the missing man, sandwiched with other discoveries of their falsehood—clue and disappointment by turns. He could remember his own perfectly spurious interest in the case, produced by such announcements staring at him from all points of the compass, and his own preposterous contributions to talk-making about them, such as "Have they found that man *Harrisson* yet ?" knowing himself the merest impostor all the while, but feeling it dutiful to be up-to-date. How came no one of them all to put two and two together ?

A gleam of a solution was supplied to the doctor's mind when he set himself to answer the question, "How should I have gone about suspecting it ?" How, indeed ? Ordinary every-day people—*you's* and *me's*—can't lightly admit to our minds the idea that we have actually got mixed up with the regular public people in the newspapers. Have not even our innocent little announcements that we have been born, or died, or got married, always had a look of having got in by accident, or under some false pretence ? Have we not felt inflated when a relation of ours has had a letter to a newspaper inserted, in real print, with his own name as bold as brass ? Vereker was not surprised, on thinking it over, that he personally had missed the clue. And if he, why not others ? Besides, all the *Harrisson* talk had been superseded by some more exciting matter before it had been recognised as possible that Fenwick's memory might never come back.

Just as he arrived at Mrs. Iggulden's a thought struck him—not heavily ; only a light, reminding flick—and he stopped a minute to see what it had to say. It referred to his interview with Scotland Yard, some six weeks after Fenwick's first appearance.

He could recall that in the course of his interview one of the younger officials spoke in an undertone to his chief ; who thereon,

after consideration, turned to the doctor and said, "Had not your man a panama hat? I understood you to say so;" and on receiving an affirmative reply, spoke again in an undertone to his subordinate to the effect, half-caught by Vereker, that "Alison's hat was black felt." Did he say by any chance Harrisson, not Alison? If so, might not that account for a rather forbidding or oppposive attitude on the Yard's part? He remembered something of fictitious claimants coming forward, representing themselves as Harrisson—desperate bidders for a chance of the Klondyke gold. They might easily have supposed this man and his quenched memory another of the same sort. Evidently if investigation was not to suffer from overgrown suspicion, only young and guileless official instinct could be trusted—plain-clothes *ingénus*. Dr. Conrad laughed to himself over a particularly outrageous escapade of Sally's, who, when her mother said they always sent such very young chicks of constables to Glenmoira Road in the morning, impudently ascribed them to inspector's eggs, laid overnight.

"My pulse—feel it!" His Goody mother greeted the doctor with a feeble voice from inarticulate lips, and a wrist outstretched. She was being moribund; to pay him out for being behindhand.

He skipped all interims, and said, with negligible inaccuracy, "It's only a quarter past."

"Don't talk, but feel!" Her failing senses could indulge a little impatience; but it was like throwing ballast out of a balloon. She meant to be all the worse directly.

Her son felt the outstretched wrist, and was relieved to find it normal—almost abnormally normal, just before lunch! But he had to pretend. A teaspoonful of brandy in half a glass of water, clearly! He knew she hated it, but she had better swallow it down. *That* was right! And he would hurry Mrs. Iggulden with lunch. However, Mrs. Iggulden had been beforehand, having seen her good gentleman coming and the table all laid ready, so she got the steak on, only she knew there would something happen if too much hurry and sure enough she broke a decanter. We do not like the responsibility of punctuation in this sentence.

"I thought you had forgotten me," quoth the revived Goody to her son, assisting her to lunch. But the excellent woman said *me* (as if it was the name of somebody else, and spelt *M* double *E*), with a compassionate moan.



Rosalind was glad to see her husband in good spirits again. He was quite like himself before that unfortunate little galvanic battery upset everything. Perhaps its effect would go off, and all he had remembered of the past grow dim again. It was a puzzle, even to Rosalind herself, that her natural curiosity about all Gerry's unknown history should become as nothing in view of the unwelcome contingencies that history might disclose. It spoke well for the happiness of the *status quo* that she was ready to forego the satisfaction of this curiosity altogether rather than confront its possible disturbing influences. "If we can only know nothing about it, and be as we are!" was the thought uppermost in her mind.

It certainly was a rare piece of good luck that, owing to Sally's leaving the house before Fenwick appeared, and running away to her madcap swim before he could join her and the doctor, she had just avoided seeing him during the worst of his depression. Indeed, his remark that he had not slept well seemed to account for all she had seen in the morning. And in the afternoon, when the whole party, minus the doctor, walked over to St. Egbert's Station for the honeymoon portion of it to take its departure for town, and the other three to say farewells, Fenwick was quite in his usual form. Only his wife watched for any differences, and unless it was that he gave way rather more freely than usual to the practice of walking with his arm round herself or Sally, or both, she could detect nothing. As the road they took was a quiet one, and they met scarcely a soul, no exception on the score of dignity was taken to this by Rosalind; and as for Sally, her general attitude was "Leave Jeremiah alone—he shall do as he likes." Lætitia's mental comment was that it wasn't Oxford Street this time, and so it didn't matter.

"I shall walk straight into papa's library," said that young married lady in answer to an inquiry from Sally, as they fell back a little to chat. "I shall just walk straight in and say we've come back."

"What do you suppose the Professor will say?"

"My dear!—it's the merest toss up. If he's got some very interesting Greek or Phœnician nonsense on hand, he'll let me kiss him over his shoulder and say, "All right—I'm busy." If it's only the Cosmocyclopædia work—which he doesn't care about, only it pays—he may look up and kiss me, or even go so far as to say: "Well!—and where's master Julius?" But I



don't expect he'll give any active help in the collision with mamma, which is sure to come. I rather hope she won't be at home the first time."

"Why? Wouldn't it be better to have it over and done with?" Sally always wants to clinch everything.

"Yes, of course; only the second time mamma's edge will be all taken off, and she'll die down. Besides, the crucial point is Paggy kissing her. It's got to be done, and it will be such a deal easier if I can get Theeny and Classy kissed first." Classy was the married sister, Clarissa. "After all, mamma must have got a shred of common-sense somewhere, and she must know that when things can neither be cured nor endured you have to pretend, sooner or later."

"You bottle up when it comes to that," said Sally philosophically. "But I shouldn't wonder, Tishy, if you found your Goody aggravating, too. She'll talk about haberdashers."

"Oh, my dear, haberdashers are a trifle! If that was all she might talk herself hoarse. Besides, I can stop that by the mantle department."

"What about it? Oh, I know, though!—about your being worth two guineas a week to try on. She would know you were not serious, though."

"Would she? I'm not so sure about it myself—not sure I'm not serious, I mean."

"Oh, Tishy! You don't mean you would go and try on at two guineas a week?"

"I really don't know, Sally dear. If I'm to have my husband's profession flung in my face at every turn, I may just as well have the advantage of it by a side-wind. Think what two guineas a week means! A hundred and four guineas a year—remember! guineas, not pounds. And Paggy thinks he could get it arranged for us to go out and dine together in the middle of the day at an Italian restaurant. . . ."

"I say, what a lark!" Sally immediately warms up to the scheme. "I could come, too. Do you know, Tishy dear, I was just going to twit you with the negro and his spots. But now I won't."

The Julius Bradshaws must have reached home early, as our story will show later that the anticipated collision with the Dragon took place the same evening. No great matter for surprise, this, to anyone who has noticed the energetic im-

patience for immediate town-event in folk just off a holiday. These two were too keen to grapple with their domestic problem to allow of delays. So, after getting some dinner in a hurry at Georgiana Terrace, Bayswater, they must needs cab straight away to Ladbroke Grove Road. As for what happened when they got there, we shall know as much as we want of it later. For the present our business lies with Fenwick and his wife ; to watch, in sympathy with the latter, for the next development in the strange mental state of the former, and to hope with her, as it must be confessed, for continued quiescence ; or, better still, for a complete return of oblivion.

It seemed so cruelly hard to Rosalind that it might not be. What had she to gain by the revival of a forgotten past—a past her own share of which she had for twenty years striven to forget ? Utterly guiltless as, conceivably, she may have known herself to be, she had striven against that past as the guilty strive with the memory of a concealed crime. And here was she, at the end of this twenty years, with all she most longed for at the beginning in her possession, mysteriously attained with a thoroughness no combination of circumstances, no patience or forbearance of her own, no self-restraint or generosity of her young husband's could possibly have brought about. Think only of what we do know of this imperfect story ! Conceive that it should have been possible for the Algernon Palliser of those days to know and understand it to the full ; indulge the supposition, however strained it may be, that his so knowing it would not have placed him in a felon's dock for the prompt and righteous murder of the betrayer—we take the first convenient name—of the woman he loved. Convince yourself this could have been ; figure to yourself a happy wedded life for the couple after Miss Sally had made her unconscious *début* with the supremest indifference to her antecedents ; construct a hypothetical bliss for them at all costs, and then say if you can fill out the picture with a relation between Sally and her putative father to be compared for a moment to the one chance has favoured now for the stepfather and stepdaughter of our story.

Our own imagination is at fault about the would-have-beens and might-have-beens in this case. The only picture our mind can form of what would have followed a full grasp of all the facts by Algernon Palliser may be dictated or suggested by a memory of what sent Mr. Slater, of Livermore's Rents, 1808, to the hospital. Rosalind knew nothing of Mr. Slater, but she could



remember well all Gerry's feats of strength in his youth—all the cracking of walnuts in his arm-joints and bending of kitchen-pokers across his neck—and also, too well, an impotence against his own anger when provoked ; it had died down now to a trifle, but she could detect the trifle still. Was such an executive to be trusted not to take the law into its own hands, to fall into the grasp of an offended legislative function later—one too dull to be able to define offence so as to avoid the condemnation, now and again, of a culprit whose technical crime has the applause of the whole human race ? Had the author of all her wrongs met his death at the hands of her young husband, might not this husband of her later life—beside her now—be still serving his time at the galleys, with every compulsory sharer in his condemnation thinking him a hero ?

It was all so much better as it had turned out. Only, could it remain so ?

At least, nothing was wrong now, at this moment. Whatever her husband had said to Vereker in that morning walk, the present hour was a breathing-space for Rosalind. The Kreutzkammer recurrence of the previous evening was losing its force for her, and there had been nothing since that she knew of. "Chaotic ideas"—the phrase he had used in the night—might mean anything or nothing.

They came back from the railway-station by what was known to them as the long short cut in contradistinction to the short short cut. The latter, Sally said, had the courage of its opinions, while the former was a time-serving cut. Could she have influenced it at the first go-off—when it originally started from the V-shaped stile your skirts stuck in, behind the Wheatsheaf—it might have mustered the resolution to go straight on, instead of going off at a tangent to Gattrell's Farm, half a mile out of the way. Was it intimidated by a statement that trespassers would be prosecuted, nailed to an oak-tree, legible a hundred years ago, perhaps, when its nails were not rust, and really held it tight—instead of, as now, merely countenancing its wish to remain from old habit ? It may have been so frightened in its timid youth ; but if so, surely the robust self-assertion of its straight start for Gattrell's had in it something of contempt for the poor old board, coupled with its well-known intention of turning to the left and going slap through the wood the minute you (or it) got there. It may even have twitted that board with its apathy in respect of trespassers. Had the threat *ever* been carried out ?



The long short cut was, according to the aborigines, a goodish step longer than the road, geometrically. But there was some inner sense—moral, ethical, spiritual—somehow metaphysical or supraphysical—in which it was a short cut, for all that. The road was a dale farther, some did say, along of the dust. But, then, there was no dust now, because it was all laid. So the reason why was allowed to lapse, and the fact to take care of itself for once. Helped by an illusion that a path through an undergrowth of nut-trees and an overgrowth of oak on such a lovely afternoon as this wasn't distance at all—even when you got hooked in the brambles—and by other palliative incidents, it was voted a very short cut indeed. Certainly not too long for Rosalind's breathing-space, and had it been even a longer short cut she would have been well contented.

Every hour passed now, without a new recurrence of some bygone, was going to give her—she knew it well beforehand—a sense of greater security. And every little incident on the walk that made a change in the rhythm of event was welcome. When they paused for refreshments—ginger-beer in stone bottles—at Gattrell's, and old Mrs. Gattrell, while she undid the corks, outlined the troubles of her husband's family and her own, she felt grateful for both to have kept clear of India and “the colonies.” No memories of California or the Arctic Circle could arise from Mrs. Gattrell's twin-sister Debory, who suffered from information—internal information, mind you; an explanation necessary to correct an impression of overstrain to the mind in pursuit of research. Nor from her elder sister Hannah, whose neuralgic sick headaches were a martyrdom to herself, but apparently a source of pride to her family. Of which the inflation, strange to say, was the greater because Dr. Knox was of opinion that they would yield to treatment and tonics; though the old lady herself was opposed to both, and said elder-flower-water. She was a pleasant old personage, Mrs. Gattrell, who always shone out as a beacon of robust health above a fever-stricken, paralysed, plague-spotted, debilitated, and disintegrating crowd of blood-relations and connexions by marriage. But not one of all these had ever left the soil they were born on, none of Mrs. Gattrell's people holding with foreign parts. And nothing whatever had ever taken place at St. Egbert's till the railway come; so it wasn't likely to arouse memories of the ice-fields of the northern cold or the tiger-hunts of the southern heat.

Rosalind found herself asking of each new thing as it arose :

“Will this bring anything fresh to his mind, or will it pass?” The wood-path the nut-tree growth all but closed over on either side she decided was safe; it could taste of nothing but his English school-boyhood, before ever she knew him. But the sudden uprush of the covey of partridges from the stubble, and their bee-line for a haven in the next field—surely danger lay that way? Think what a shot he was in the old days! However, he only said, “Poor dears, they don’t know how near the thirty-first is,” and seemed to be able to know that much from past experience without discomfort at not knowing more.

When Sally proposed fortune-telling in connexion with a *bonafide* gipsy woman, who looked (she said) exactly like in Lavengro, her mother’s first impulse was to try and recall if she and the Gerry of old times had ever been in contact with gipsies, authentic or otherwise, and, after decision in the negative, to feel that this wanderer was more welcome than not, as having a tendency to conduct his mind safely into new channels. Even the conclave of cows he had to disperse that they might get through a gate—cows that didn’t mind how long they waited at it, having time on their hands—suggested the same kind of query. She was rapidly getting to look at everything from the point of view of what it was going to remind her husband of. She must struggle against the habit that was forming, or it would become insupportable. But then, again, the thought would come back that every hour that passed without an alarm was another step towards a safe haven; and who could say that in a week or so things might not be, at least, no worse than they were before this pestilent little galvanic battery broke in upon her peace.

The fact that he had spoken of new memories to Vereker and had not repeated them to her was no additional source of uneasiness; rather, if anything, the contrary. For she could not entertain the idea that Gerry would keep back from her anything he could tell to Vereker. What had actually happened was necessarily inconceivable by her—that a *recollected recollection* of his own marriage with her should be interpreted by him as a memory of a marriage with some other woman unknown, who might, for anything he knew, be still living; that his inference as to the bearing of this on his own conduct was that he should refrain, at any cost to himself, from claiming, so to speak, his own identity; should accept the personality chance had forced upon him for her sake; should even forego the treasure of her



sympathy, more precious far to him than the heavy score to his credit at the banks of New York and San Francisco, rather than dig up what needs must throw doubt on the validity of their marriage, and turn her path of life, now smooth, to one of stones and thorns. For that was the course he had sketched out for himself ; and had it only been possible for oblivion to draw a sharp line across the slowly reviving record, and to say to memory : " Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther," Fenwick might have persevered in this course successfully till now. And then all our story would have been told—at least, as far as Rosalind and Fenwick go. And we might say farewell to them at this moment as the cows reluctantly surrender passage-way of the long short cut, and Gerry saunters on, seemingly at ease from his own mind's unwelcome activities, with Sally on one arm and his wife in the other, and Mrs. Grundy nowhere. But no conspiracies are possible to memory and oblivion. They are a couple that act independently and consult nobody's convenience but their own.

It may easily be that Rosalind, had she been mistress of all the facts and taken in the full position, would have decided to run the risks incidental to confronting her husband with his own past—taken him into her confidence and told him. With the chance in view that his reason might become unsettled from the chronic torment of constant half-revivals of memory, would it not almost be safer to face the acute convulsion of a sudden *éclaircissement*—to put happiness to the touch, and win or lose it all ? Sally could be got out of the way for long enough to allow of a resumption of equilibrium after the shock of the first disclosure and a completely established understanding that she *must not be told*, come what might. Supposing that she could tell, and he could hear, the whole story of twenty years ago better than when a terrible position warped it for teller and hearer in what had since become to her an intolerable dream—supposing this done, and each could understand the other, might not the very strangeness of the fact that the small new life that played so large a part in that dream had become Sally since, and was the only means by which Sally could have been established, might not this tell for peace ? Might it not even raise the question, " What does a cloud of twenty years ago matter at all ?" and suggest the answer, " Nothing ? For did not Sally come to us out of the cloud, and could we do without her ?"

But Rosalind's half-insight into the patchwork of her husband's



perceptions warranted no step so decisive. Rather, if anything, it pointed to a gradual resumption of his *status quo* of a few days ago. After all, had he not had (and completely forgotten) recurrences like that of the Baron and the fly-wheel? Well, perhaps the last was a shade more vivid than the others. But then see now, had he not forgotten it already to all outward seeming?

So that the minds of the two of them worked to a common end—silence. Hers in the hope that the effects of the galvanic current—if that did it—would die away and leave him rest for his; his in the fear that behind the unraised curtain that still hid his early life from himself was hidden what might become a baleful power to breed unrest for hers.

But it all depended on his own mastery of himself. Except he told it, who should know that he was Harrisson? And *how* he felt the shelter of the gold! Who was going to suspect that a man who could command wealth in six figures by disclosing his identity, would keep it a secret? And for his wife's sake too! A pitiful four or five-figure man might—yes. But hundreds of thousands!—think of it!

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

So it came about that during the remainder of that day and part of the next Fenwick either made no further exploration of his past ; or, if he did so, concealed his discoveries. For he not only kept silence with Rosalind, but even with Vereker was absolutely reserved, never alluding to their conversation of the morning. And the doctor accepted this reserve, and asked no questions.

As for Rosalind, she was only too glad to catch at the support of the medical authority and to abstain from question or suggestion ; for the present certainly, and, unless her silence—as might be—should seem to imply a motive on her part, to maintain it until her husband revived the subject by disclosing further recollections of the bygone time. Happily Sally knew nothing about it ; *that* her mother was convinced of. And Sally wasn't likely to know anything, for Vereker's professional discretion could be relied on, even if her suspicions were excited. And, really, except that Fenwick seemed a little drowsy and reflective, and that Rosalind had a semitone of consolation in her manner towards him, there was nothing to excite suspicion.

After the cows—this is an expression borrowed from Sally, later in the afternoon—conversation flagged through the rest of the walk home. Except for regrets, more than once expressed, that it would be much too late for tea when we got in, and a passing word on the fact that at the seaside one got as greedy as some celebrated glutton—a Roman emperor, perhaps—very few ideas were interchanged. But a little conversation was made out of the scarcity of a good deal, for the persistent optimism of Sally recognised that it was awfully jolly saying nothing on such a lovely evening. Slight fatigue, combined with the beauty of sky and sea and distant downland, the lengthening shadows of the wheatsheaves, and the scarlet of poppies in the stubble, seemed good to justify contemplation and silence. It was an

hour to caress in years to come, none the less that it was accepted as the mere routine of daily life in the short term of its existence. It was an hour that came to an end when the party arrived at the hedge of the unripe sloes that had checked the onset of Albion Villas towards the new town, and passed through the turnstile Fenwick and Vereker had passed through in the morning. Then speech came back, and each did what all folk invariably do after a long spell of silence—revealed what they were being silent about, or seemed to be. Most likely Fenwick's contribution was only a blind, as his mind must have been full of many thoughts he wished to keep to himself.

"I wonder when Paganini's young woman's row with her mother's going to come off—to-day or to-morrow?"

"I was wondering whether it would come off at all. I dare say she'll accept the inevitable." Thus Rosalind, and for our part we believe this also was not quite candid—in fact, was really suggested by her husband's remark. But Sally's was a genuine disclosure, and really showed what her mind had been running on.

"I've been meditating a Crusade," she said, with remoteness from current topics in her voice. And both her companions immediately made concessions to one that seemed to them genuine as compared with their own.

"Against whom, kitten?" said her mother.

And Fenwick reinforced her with, "Yes, who's the Crusade to be against, Sarah?"

"Against the Octopus." And Sally says this with the most perfectly unconscious gravity, as though a Crusade against an octopus was a very common occurrence in every-day life. The eyes of her companions twinkle a little interchange across her unseen, but are careful to keep anything suggesting a smile out of their voices as they apply for enlightenment.

"Because of poor Prosy," Sally explains. "You'll see now. She won't allow him to come round this evening, you see if she does!" She is so intent upon her subject matter that they might almost have smiled aloud without detection, after all.

"When's it to come off, Sarah—the Crusade?"

"I was thinking of going round this evening if he doesn't turn up."

"Suppose we all go," Fenwick suggests. And Rosalind assents. The Crusade may be considered organized. "We'll give him till eight-forty-five," Sally says, forecasting strategy, "and then if he doesn't come we'll go."



Eight-forty-five came, but no doctor. So the Crusade came off as arranged, with the result that the Christian forces, on arriving in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, found that the Octopus responsible for the personation of the Saracens had just gone to bed. It was an ill-advised Crusade, because if the Christians had only had a little patience, the released prisoner would have looked round as soon as his janitor was asleep. As it turned out, no sooner were the visitors' voices audible than the Octopus became alive to the pleasures of society, and renounced sleep in its favour. She would slip something on and come down, and did so. Her doing so was out of keeping with the leading idea of the performance, presenting the Paynim as an obliging race; but a meek and suffering one, though it never aired its grievances. These, however, were the chief subjects of conversation during the visit, which, in spite of every failure in dramatic propriety, was always spoken of in after days as "the Crusade." It came to an end in due course, the Saracen host retiring to bed, with benedictions.

Vereker walked back with our friends to Mrs. Lobjoit's through the sweet night-air a considerate little shower of rain, that came down while they were sympathetically engaged, had just washed clean. Vapour-drifts that were wavering between earth and sky, and sacrificing their birthright of either cloudship or foghood, were accompanying a warm sea-wind towards the north. Out beyond, and quite clear of all responsibility for them and theirs, was a flawless heaven with the stellar and planetary universe in it, pitiless and passionless eyes perhaps—as Tennyson calls them—and strange fires; but in this case without power to burn and brand their nothingness into the visitors to St. Sennans, who laughed and talked and smoked and took no notice; and, indeed, rather than otherwise, considered that Orion's Belt and Aldebaran had been put there to make it a fine night for them to laugh and talk and smoke in.

It was pleasant to Vereker, after his walk with Fenwick in the morning, to find the latter like his usual cheerful self again. The doctor had had rather a trying time with his Goody mother, so that the day had been more one of tension than of peace, and it was a heavenly respite to him from filial duties dutifully borne, to walk home with the goddess of his paradise—the paradise that was so soon to come to an end and send him to the release of his "locum," Mr. Neckitt. Never mind. The

having such a time to look back to in the future was quite as much as one general practitioner, with a duty to his mother, could in reason expect. Was Dr. Conrad aware, we wonder, how much the philosophical resignation that made this attitude of thought possible was due to the absence of any other visible favoured applicant for Miss Sally, and the certainty that he would see her once or twice a week at least after he had gone back to his prescriptions and his diary of cases ?

Probably he wasn't ; and when, on arriving at Lobjoit's, Fenwick announced that he didn't want to go in yet, and would accompany the doctor back to Iggulden's and take a turn round, the only misgiving that could try for an insecure foothold in the mind now given up to a delirium it called Sally, was one that Fenwick might have some new painful memory to tell. But he was soon at rest about this. Fenwick wasn't going to talk about himself. Very much the reverse, if one's own reverse is some one else. He was going to talk about the doctor, into whose arm he slipped his own as soon as he had lighted his second cigar. For they had not walked quick from Iggulden's.

"Now tell me about Sir Dioscorides Nayler and the epileptiform disorders."

"Miss Sally's been telling you. . . ."

"No, she didn't—Sally did." Both laughed. The doctor will make it Sally next time—that's understood. "You told Sally and she told me. What's the damage to be ?"

"How much did Sally tell you ?" The little formality comes easier to the doctor's shyness as it figures, this time, quotation-wise. It is a repeat of Fenwick's use of it.

"Sally said three thousand."

"Yes, that's what I told her. But it's not official. He may want more. He may let me have it for three. Only I don't know why I should have it for less than anyone else."

"Never you mind why ! That's no concern of yours, my dear boy. What you've got to think of is of yourself and Mrs. Vereker. Dioscorides will take care of himself—trust him !"

"Yes, of course, I have to think of my mother." One can hear in the speaker's voice what may be either self-reproach for having neglected this aspect of the case, or very tolerant indictment of Fenwick for having mistakenly thought he had done so.

"What's the man thinking of ? Of course you have, but I didn't mean your mother. She's a dear old lady"—this came



grudgingly—"but I didn't mean her. I meant the Mrs. Vereker that's to come. Your wife, dear fellow, your wife."

The way the young man flushed up, hesitated, stammered, couldn't organize a sane word, amused Fenwick intensely. Of course he was, so to speak, quite at home—understood the position thoroughly. But he wasn't going to torment the doctor. He was only making it impossible for him to avoid confession, for his own sake. He did not wait for the stammering to take form, but continued :

"I mean the young lady you told Sally about—the young lady you are hesitating to propose to because there'll be what you call complications in medicine—complications about your mamma, to put it plainly. . . . Oh yes, of course, Sally told me all about it directly." Vereker cannot resist a laugh, for all his embarrassment, a laugh which somehow had the image of Sally in it. "She *would*, you know. Sally's the sort of party that—that, if she'd been Greek, would have been the daughter of an Arcadian shepherdess and a thunderbolt."

"Of course she would. I say, Fenwick, look here. . . ."

"Have another cigar, old man."

"No, I've smoked enough. That one's lasted all the time since we came out. Look here—what I want to say is . . . well, that I was a great fool—did wrong in fact—to talk to Sally about that young lady. . . ."

"And to that young lady about Sally," Fenwick says quietly. For half a second—such alacrity has thought—Vereker takes his meaning wrong ; thinks he really believes in the other young lady. Then it flashes on him, and he knows how his companion has been seeing through him all the while. But so loveable is Fenwick, and so much influence is there in the repose of his strength that there is no resentment on Vereker's part that he should be thus seen through. He surrenders at discretion.

"I see you know," he says helplessly.

"Know you love Sally ?—of course I do ! So does her mother. So does yours, for that matter. So does every one, except herself. Why, even you yourself know it ! *She* never will know it, unless she hears it on the best authority—your own, you know."

"Ought I to tell her ? I know I was all wrong about that humbug-girl I cooked up to tell her about. I altogether lost my head, and was a fool."

"I can't see what end you proposed to yourself by doing it," says Fenwick a little maliciously. "If Sally had recommended



you to speak up, because it was just possible the young lady might be pining for you all the time, you couldn't have asked her *her* name, and then said, 'That's hers—you're her !' like the fat boy in 'Pickwick.' No !—I consider, my dear boy, that you didn't do yourself any good by that ingenious fiction. You know all the while you wouldn't have been sorry to think she understood you."

"I don't know that I didn't think she did. I really don't know what I did or didn't think. I quite lost my head over it, that's the truth."

"Highly proper. Quite consistent with human experience ! It's the sort of job chaps always do lose their heads over. The question now is, What are we going to do next ?" Which meant what was Vereker going to do next ? and was understood by his hearer in that sense. He made no answer at the moment, and Fenwick was not going to press for one.

A Newcastle collier had come in to deliver her cargo some days since, before the wind sprang up, and the coal-carts had been passing and repassing across the sands at low water ; for there was a new moon somewhere in the sky when she came, as thin as a sickle, clinging tight round the business moon that saw to the spring-tides, a phantom sphere an intrepid star was daring to go close to. This brig had not been disappointing her backers, for wagers had been freely laid that she would drag her moorings in the wind, and drift. Fenwick and Vereker stopped in their walk to lean on the wooden rail above the beach that skirted the two inclines, going either way, up which the waggons had been a couple of hours ago scrambling over the shingle against time, to land one more load yet while the ebb allowed it. They could hear the yeo-yeo ! of the sail-hoisters at work on the big main-sail abaft, and wondered how on earth she was going to be got clear with so little sea-way and the wind dead in shore. But they were reassured by the ancient mariner with the striped shirt, whose mission in life seemed to be to stand about and enlighten land-minds about sea-facts. The master of yander craft had doon that much afower, and he'd do it again. Why, he'd known him from three year old, the striped shirt had ! Which settled the matter. Then presently the clink-clink of the windlass dragging at the anchor. They watched her in silence till, free of her moorings, anyone could have sworn she would be on shore to a certainty. But she wasn't ! She seemed mysteriously to be able to manage for herself, and just as a berth

for the night on the shingle appeared inevitable, leaned over to the wind and crept away from the land, triumphant.

Then, the show being over, as Fenwick and Vereker turned to look the lateness of the hour in the face, and get home to bed, the latter answered the question of the former, as though he had but just asked it.

"Speak to Sally. I shall have to." And then added, with an awestruck face and bated breath: "But it's *awful!*" A moment after he was laughing at himself, as he said to his companion, referring to a very palpable fact, "I don't wonder I made you laugh just now."

They walked on without much said till they came to Iggulden's; when the doctor, seeing no light in the sitting-room, hoped his worthy mother had fulfilled a promise made when they came away, and gone to bed. It was then past eleven. But he was reckoning without his host.

Fenwick said to him, as they stood on Iggulden's threshold and doormat respectively—presuming rashly, on imperfect information, to delay farewells—"Now look here, Conrad, my dear boy (I like your name Conrad), don't you go and boil over to Sally to-morrow, nor next day. You'll only spoil the rest of your stay, maybe. . . . What! well—what I mean is that nothing I say prejudices the kitten. You'll understand that, I'm sure?"

"Perfectly. Of course, if Sally were to say she knew somebody she would like a deal better, there's no reason why she shouldn't. . . . I mean *I* couldn't complain."

"Yes—yes! I see. You'd exonerate her. Good boy! Very proper." And indeed the doctor had felt, as the words passed his lips, that he was rather a horrid liar. But the point didn't matter. Fenwick laughed it off: "Just you take my advice, and refer the matter to the kitten the last day you're here. Monday, won't it be? And don't think about it!"

"Oh no! I'm a philosophical sort of chap, I am! Never in extremes. Good night!"

"I see. *Sperat infestis metuit secundis alteram sortem bene præparatum pectus* Horace." Fenwick ran this through in a breath; and the doctor, a little hazy in school-memories of the classics, said, "What's that?" and began translating it—"The bosom well prepared for either lot, fears. . ." Fenwick caught him up and completed the sentence:

"Fears what is good, and hopes for what is not. Cut away to bed, old chap, and sleep sound. . . ." Then he paused a



moment, as he saw the doctor looking a question at him intently, and just about to speak it. He answered it before it came:

"No, no! Nothing more. I mean to forget all about it, and take my life as it stands. Bother Mr. Harrisson!" He dropped his voice to say this; then raised it again. "Don't you fret about me, doctor. Remember, I'm Algernon Fenwick! Good night!"

"Good night!" And then the doctor, with the remains of heart-turmoil in him, and a brain reeling, more or less, went up into what he conceived to be an empty dark room, and was disconcerted by an ill-used murmur in the darkness—a meek, submissive voice of one accustomed to slights:

"I told her to blow it out and go to bed. It is all—quite—right, my dear. So do not complain. Now help me with my things, and I will get to bed."

"My dear mother! I *am* so sorry. I had no idea you had not gone long ago!"

"My dear!—it does not matter in the least now. What is done, is done. Be careful with the grease over my work. These candles drop dreadfully, unless you hold them exactly upright. And gutter. Now give me your arm, and I will go to bed. I *think* I shall sleep." And the worthy woman was really—if her son could only have got his eyes freed from the scales of domestic superstition, and seen it—intensely happy and exultant at this fiendish little piece of discomfort-mongering. She had scored; there was no doubt of it. She was even turning it over in her own mind whether it would not bear repetition at a future time; and quite intended, if so, to enjoy herself over it. Now the doctor was contrite and heavy at heart at his cruel conduct; walking about—just think!—and talking over his own affairs while his self-sacrificing mother was sitting in the dark, with the lamp out! To be sure there was no visible reason why she should have had it put out, except as a picturesque and imaginative way of rubbing her altruism into its nearest victim. Unless, indeed, it was done in order that the darkened window should seem to announce to the returning truant that she had gone to bed, and to lull his mind to unconsciousness of the ambush that awaited him.

Anyhow, the doctor was so impressed with his own delinquency that he felt it would be impossible, the lamp having been put out, to take his mother into his confidence about his conversation with Fenwick. Which he certainly would have done—late as the hour was—if it had been left in. So he said good



night, and carried the chaos of his emotions away to bed with him, and lay awake with them till cock-crow.

As Fenwick walked back home, timing his pace by his expectation of his cigar's duration, he wondered whether, perhaps, he had not been a little rash. He felt obliged to go back on interviews with Sally, in which the doctor had been spoken of. He recalled for his justification one in particular. The family conclave at Krakatoa Villa had recurred to a remark of Rosalind's about the drawback to Vereker's practice of his bachelorhood. He was then, as it were, brought up for a second reading, and new clauses added to him containing schedules of possible wives. Fenwick had noticed, then, that Sally's assent to the insertion of any candidate's name turned on two points: one, the lady's consent being taken for granted; the other, that every young single female human creature known by name or describable by language was actually out of the question, or inadmissible in its answer. She rejected almost all applicants for the post of a doctor's wife without examining their claims, on the ground of moral or physical defect—as, for instance, you never would go and tie up poor Prosy to a wife that golloped. Sylvia Peplow, indeed! Interrogated about the nature of “golloping,” Sally could go no nearer than that Miss Peplow looked as if she couldn't help it. And her sister was worse: she was perfectly pecky, and shut up with a click. And as for the large Miss Baker—why, you knew how large *she* was, and it would be quite ridiculous! Besides, her stupidity!

The only candidates that got the least consideration owed their success to their means or expectations. Caroline Smith had, or would have sometime, a thousand a year. But she squinted. Still, she might be thought over. Mrs. Pollicitus Biggs's cousin Isabella would have two thousand when her mother died, but the vitality of the latter was indescribable. Besides, she was just like her name, Isabella, and did her hair religiously. There was Chariclea Epimenides, certainly, who had got three thousand, and would have six more. She might be worth thinking of. . . .

“Why don't you have him yourself, Sarah?” Fenwick had asked at this point. Rosalind had just left the room to speak to Anne. But he didn't want Sarah to be obliged to answer, so he went on: “Why are all these young ladies' incomes exactly in round thousands?”

To which Sally had replied : " They always are, when you haven't got 'em." But had fallen into contemplation, and presently said—out of the blue—" Because I'm an unsettled sort of party—a vagrant. I shouldn't do for a G.P.'s wife, thank you, Jeremiah ! I should like to live in a caravan, and go about the country, and wood fires out of doors." Was it, Fenwick wondered, the gipsies they had seen to-day that had made her think of this ? and then he recalled how he afterwards heard the kitten singing to herself the old ballad :

" What care I for my goose-feather bed ?  
What care I for my money oh ?"

and hearing her so sing had somehow imputed to the parade of bravado in the swing of its rhythm a something that might have belonged to a touched chord. Like enough a mistake of his, said Reason. But for all that the reminiscence played its part in soothing Fenwick's misgivings of his own rashness.

" The kitten's all right," said he to himself. " And if she doesn't want Master Conrad, the sooner he knows it the better !" But he had little doubt of the course things would take as he stopped to look at that venturesome star, that seemed to be going altogether too near the moon for safety.

In a few moments he turned again towards home. And then his mind must needs go off to the thing of all others he wished not to think of—*himself*. He had come to see this much clearly, that until the veil floated away from between him and his past and left the whole atmosphere transparent, there could be no certainty that a recrudescence of that past would not be fatal to his wife's happiness. And inevitably, therefore, to his own. Having once formulated the idea that for the future *he* was to be one person and Harrisson another, he found its entertainment in practice easier than he had anticipated. He had only to say to himself that it was for her sake that he did it, and he did not find it altogether impossible to dismiss his own identity from the phantasmagoria that kept on coming back and back before his mind, and to assign the whole drama to another person ; to whom he allowed the name of Harrisson all the easier from his knowledge that it never had been really his own. Very much the easier, too, no doubt, from the sense that the function of memory was still diseased, imperfect, untrustworthy. How could it be otherwise when he still was unable to force it back beyond a certain limit ? It was mainly a vision of America,



and, previous to that, a mystery of interminable avenues of trees, and an unexplicable horror of a struggle with death. There he always lost himself. In the hinterland of this there was that vision of a wedding somewhere. And then bewilderment, because the image of his living wife, his very soul of the world he now dwelt in, the woman whose daughter had grown into his heart as his own—yes, not only the image, but the very name of her—had come in and supplanted that of the forgotten wife of that forgotten day. So much so that more than once, in striving to follow the clue given by that railway-carriage, his mind had involuntarily called the warm living thing that came into his arms from it “Rosey.” In the face of that, what was the worth of anything he should recollect now, that he should not discard it as a mere phantasm, for her sake? How almost easy to say to himself, “that was Harrisous,” and then to add, “whoever he was,” and dismiss him.

Do you—you who read—find this so very difficult to understand? Can you recall no like imperfect memory of your own that, multiplied a hundredfold, would supply an analogy, a standpoint to look into Fenwick’s disordered mind from?

After his delirious collision with his first vigorous revival of the past, he was beginning to settle down to face it, helped by the talisman of his love for Rosalind, whom it was his first duty to shield from whatever it should prove to hold of possible injury to her. That happy hour of the dying sunset in the shorn cornfields, with her and Sally and the sky above and the sea beyond, had gone far to soothe the perturbation of the night. And his talk of the morning with this young man he had just left had helped him strongly. For he knew in his heart he could safely go to him again if he could not bear his own silence, could trust him with whatever he could tell at all to anyone. Could he not, when he was actually ready to trust him with—Sally?

So, though he was far from feeling at rest, a working equilibrium was in sight. He could acquiesce in what came back to him, as it came; need never struggle to hasten or retard it. Little things would float into his mind, like house-flies into the ray from a shutter-crack in a darkened room, and float away again uncaptured, or whizz and burr round and against each other as the flies do, and then decide—as the flies do—that neither concerns the other and each may go his way. But he was nowise bound to catch these things on the wing, or persuade them to



live in peace with one another. If they came, they came ; and if they went, they went.

Such a one caught his thoughts, and held them for a moment as, satisfied that astronomy would see to that star, he turned to go straight home to Lobjoit's. That would just last out the cigar. But what was it now ? What was the fly that flew into his sun-ray this time, that it should make him remember a line of Horace, to be so pat with it, and to know what it meant, too ?

But this fact, that he could not tell how he came to know its meaning, showed him how decisively the barrier line across the memory of his boyhood was drawn, or, it might be, his early manhood. He could not remember, properly speaking, the whole of his life in the States, but he could remember telling a man—one Larpent, a man with a club-foot, at Ontario—that he had been there over fifteen years. This man has nothing to do with this story, but he happens to serve as an illustration of the disjointed way in which small details would tell out clear against a background of confusion. Why, Fenwick could remember his face plainly—how close-shaven he was, and black over the razorland ; how his dentist had inserted an artificial tooth that didn't match, and shone out white. But as to the fifteen years he had spent in the States, that he had told Mr. Larpent of, they grew dimmer and dimmer as he tried to carry his recollection further back. Beyond them—or rather, longer ago than they, properly speaking—came that endless, intolerable labyrinth of trees, and then, earlier still, that railway-carriage. It was getting clearer ; but the worst of it was that the clearer it got, the clearer grew the Rosey that came out of it. As long as that went on, there was nothing of it all he could place faith in. He had been told that no man could be convinced, by his own reason, of his own hallucination. He would supply a case to the contrary. It would amuse him one day, if ever he came to know that girl of the railway-carriage was dead, to tell Rosalind all his experiences, and how bravely he fought against what he knew to be delusion.

But he must make an effort against this sort of thing. Here was he, who had just made up his mind—so he phrased it—to remain himself, and refuse to be Harrisson, no sooner was he left alone for a few minutes than he must needs be raking up the past. And that, too, because of a line of Horace !—sound in itself, but quite cut asunder from its origin, the book he read it in, or the voice he heard read it. What did that line matter ?

Leave it for Mr. Harrisson in that state of pre-existence. As well make a point of recalling the *provenance* of any little thing that had happened in this his present life. Well, for instance, Mary and the fat boy in "Pickwick." Rosalind had read him that aloud, he knew, but he couldn't say when. Was he going to worry himself to recall that, which could do him no harm to know? Surely not. And if so, why strive to bring back things better forgotten? It is useless to endeavour to make the state of Fenwick's mind, at this point of the imperfect revival of memory, appear other than incredible. A person who has had the painful experience of forgetting his own name in a dream would perhaps understand it best. Or, without going so far, can no help be got towards it from our frequent certainties about some phrase (for instance) that we think we cannot possibly forget? about some date that we believe no human power will ever obliterate? And in five minutes—gone—utterly gone! Truly, there is no evidence but a man's own word for what he does or does not, can or cannot, recollect.

"I say, Rosey, when was it you read to me about Mary and the fat boy in 'Pickwick'?" Fenwick, having suggested a doubt to himself about his power to recall what he supposed to have happened recently, had, of course, set about doing it directly. His question was asked of his wife as he came into her bedroom on his return. He mounted the stairs singing to himself,

"Que nous mangerons Marott-e,  
Bec-à-bee et toi et moi,"

till he came in to where Rosalind was sitting reading, with her wonderful hair combed free—probably by Sally for a treat. Then he asked his question rather suddenly, and it made her start.

"I was in the middle of my book, and you made me jump." He gave her a kiss for apology. "What's the question? When did I read to you about Mary and the fat boy? I couldn't say. I feel as if I had, though."

"Was it out in the garden at K. Villa? It wasn't here." He usually called Krakatoa "K" for working purposes.

"No, it certainly wasn't here. It must have been at home, only I can't recollect when. Ask Sally."

"The kitten wasn't there."

"She would know, though. She always knows. She's not asleep yet. . . . Sallykin!" The young person is on the other

side of a mere wooden partition, congenial to the architecture of Lobjoit's, and her reply conveys the idea of a speaker in bed who hasn't moved to answer.

"What? Be quick. I'm going to sleep."

"I'm so sorry, chick. When was it I read to this man Mary and the fat boy in 'Pickwick'?"

"How should I know? Not when I was there."

"All right, Sarah." Thus Fenwick, to whom Sarah responds:

"Good-night, Jeremiah. Go to bed, and don't keep decent Christian people awake at this hour of the night. Take mother's book away, and cut it."

Rosalind closes her book and says: "*I* don't know, darling, if Sally doesn't. Why do you want to know?"

"Couldn't say. It crossed my mind. I know the kitten wasn't there, though. Good-night, love.... Oh yes, I shall sleep to-night. Ta, ta, Sarah—pleasant dreams!"

But he had not reached the door when the voice of Sarah came again, with the implication of a mouth that had come out into the open.

"Stop, Jeremiah!" it said. "It wasn't at K. Villa."

"Why not, chick?"

"Because Pickwick's *lost*! It was lent to those impossible people at Turnham Green, and they stole it. I know they did. Name like Marylebone."

"The Haliburtons? Why, that's ever so long ago." Thus Rosalind.

"Of course it is. It's been gone ages. I'm going to sleep. Good-night!" And Jeremiah said good-night once more and departed.

Sally didn't go straight to sleep, but she made a start on her way there. It was not a vigorous start, for she had hardly begun upon it when she desisted, and sat up in bed and listened.

"What's that, mother? Nothing wrong, is there?"

"No, darling child, what should be wrong? Go to sleep."

"I thought I heard you gasp, or snuffle, or sigh, or sob, or click in your throat. That's all. Sure you didn't?"

"Quite sure. Now, do be a reasonable kitten, and go to sleep; I shall be in bed in half-a-second."

And Sally subsides, but first makes a stipulation: "*You will* sleep in your hair, mother darling, won't you? Or, at least, do it up, and not that hateful nightcap?"

But though Rosalind felt conscientiously able to disclaim any of the sounds Sally had described, something audible had



occurred in her breathing. Sally's first word had gone nearest, but it was hardly a full grown gasp.

Her husband's question about "Pickwick" had scarcely taken her attention off an exciting story-climax, and she really did want to know why the Archbishop turned pale as death when the Countess kissed him. Gerry was looking well and cheerful again, and there was nothing to connect his inquiry with any reminiscence of "B.C." So, as soon as he had gone, she reopened her book—not without a mental allusion to a dog in Proverbs—and went on where she had left off. The writer had not known how to manage his Archbishop and Countess, and the story went flat and slushy like an ill-whipped *zabajone*. She put the book aside, and wondered whether "Pickwick" really *had* been alienated by the impossible Haliburtons; sat thinking, but only of the thing of *now*—nothing of buried records.

So she sat, it might be for two minutes. Then, quite suddenly, she had bitten her lip and her brows had wrinkled. And her eyes had locked to a fixed look that would stay till she had thought this out. So her face said, and the stillness of her hand.

For she had suddenly remembered when and where it was she had read to that man about Mary and the fat boy. It was in the garden at her mother's twenty-two years ago. She remembered it well now, and quite suddenly. She could remember how Gerry, young-man-wise, had tried to utilise Thackeray to show his greater knowledge of the world—had flaunted Piccadilly and Pall Mall before the dazzled eyes of an astonished suburban. She could remember how she read it aloud to him, because, when he read over her shoulder, she always turned the page before he was ready. And his decision that Dickens's characters were never gentlemen, and her saying perhaps that was why he was so amusing. And then how he got the book from her and went on reading while she went away for her lawn-tennis shoes, and when she came back found he had only two more pages to read, and then he would come and play.

But it spoke well for her husband's chances of a quiet time to-night that he should hold this memory in his mind, and yet be secure against a complete resurrection of the past. Nothing else might grow from it. He evidently thought the reading had been at Shepherd's Bush. He would hardly have said, "the kitten wasn't there," unless his ideas had been glued to that spot. But then—and Rosalind's mind swam to think of it—

how very decisively the kitten was “not there” in that other garden two-and-twenty years ago.

It was at that moment the gasp, or sigh, or sob, or whatever it was, awoke Sally. Her mother had been strong against the mere memory of the happy hour of thoughtless long ago ; but then, this that was to come—this thing the time was thoughtless of ! Was it not enough to force a gasp from self-control itself ? a cry from any creature claiming to be human ? “ *The kitten wasn’t there !* ” No, truly she was not.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

THAT was a day of many little incidents, and a fine day into the bargain. Perhaps the next day was helped to be a flat day by the barometer, which had shown its usual untrustworthiness and gone down. The wind's grievance—very perceptible to the leeward of keyholes and window-cracks—may have been against this instability. It had been looking forward to a day's rest, and here this meteorology must needs be fussing. Neptune on the contrary was all the fresher for his half-holiday, and was trotting out tiny white ponies all over his fields, who played bo-peep with each other in and out of the valleys of the ploughland. But they were grey valleys now, that yesterday were smiling in the sun. And the sky was a mere self-coloured sky (a modern expression, as unconvincing as most of its congeners), and wanted to make everything else as grey as itself. Also there came drifts of fine rain that wetted you through, and your umbrella wasn't any good. So a great many of the visitors to St. Sennans thought they would stop at home and get those letters written.

Sally wouldn't admit that the day was flat *per se*, but only that it had become so owing to the departure of Lætitia and her husband. She reviewed the latter a good deal, as one who had recently been well under inspection and had stood the test. He was really a very nice fellow, haberdasher or no, wasn't he, mother? To which Rosalind replied that he was a very nice fellow indeed, only so quiet. If he had had his violin with him, he would have been much more perceptible. But she supposed it was best to travel with it as little as possible. For it had been decided, all things considered, that the precious Strad should be left locked up at home. "It's got an insurance policy all to itself," said Sally, "for three hundred pounds." She was quite awestruck by the three hundred golden sovereigns which these pounds would have been if they had had an existence of their own off paper.



"You ought to have an insurance policy all to yourself, Sarah," said Fenwick. "Only I don't believe any office would accept you. Fancy your swimming out like that yesterday! How far did you go?"

"Round the buoy and back again. I say, Jeremiah, if ever I get drowned, mind you rush to the bathing-machine and see if there's a copy of 'Alley Sloper' or 'Tit-Bits.' Because there'd be fifty pounds for each. Think of that!" Sally is delighted with these sums, too, to the extent of quite losing sight of the sacrifice necessary for their acquisition.

"Two whole fifties!" Fenwick says, adding after consideration: "I think we had sooner keep our daughter, eh, Rosey?" And Rosalind agreed. Only she really was a shocking madcap, the kitten!

Had some flavour of Fenwick's mental history got in the air, that Sally, presumably with no direct information about its last chapter, should say to him suddenly: "It is such a puzzle to me, Jeremiah, that you've never recollected the railway-carriage." He was saved from telling fibs in reply—for he *had* recollected the railway-carriage, and left it, as it were, for Mr. Harrisson—by Sally continuing: "When you were Mr. Fenwick, and I wasn't at liberty to kiss you." She did so to illustrate.

"I don't see how I could reasonably have resented your kissing me, Sarah. And I'm Mr. Fenwick now."

"On the contrary, you're Jeremiah. But if you were he ever so, I'm puzzled why Mr. Fenwick *now* can't remember Mr. Fenwick *then*."

"He *can't*, Sarah dear. He can no more remember Mr. Fenwick *then* than if no such person had ever existed." It was a clever equivocation, for though he had so far made nothing of the name on his arm, he was quite clear he came back to England Harrisson. His gravity and sadness as he said it may have been not so much duplicity as a reflection from his turgid current of thought of the last two days. It imposed on Sally, who decided in her own mind on changing the topic as soon as she could do it without a jerk. Meanwhile, a stepping-stone was available—extravagant treatment of the subject with a view to help from laughter.

"I wonder what Mr. Fenwick *then* would have thought if I had kissed him in the railway-carriage."

"He'd have thought you must be Sally, only he hadn't noticed it. *He* wouldn't have made a rumpus on high moral

grounds, I'm sure. But I don't know about the old cock that talked about the terms of the Company's Charter. . . ."

"Hullo!" Sally interrupts him blankly. He had better have let it alone. But it wouldn't do to admit anything.

"What's 'hullo,' Sarah?"

"See how you're recollecting things! Jeremiah's recollecting the railway-carriage, mother—the electrocution-carriage."

"Are you, darling?" Rosalind, coming behind his chair, puts her hands round his neck. "What have you recollected?"

"I don't think I've recollected anything the kitten hasn't told me," says Fenwick dreamily. But Sally is positive she never told him anything about the terms of the Company's Charter.

Rosalind adheres to her policy of keeping Sally out of it as much as possible. In this case a very small fib indeed serves the purpose: "You must have told him, chick; or perhaps I repeated it. I remember your telling *me* about the elderly gentleman who was in a rage with the Company." Sally looked doubtful, but gave up the point.

Nevertheless, Fenwick felt certain in his own heart that "the terms of the Company's Charter" was a bit of private recollection of his own. And Rosalind had never heard of it before. But it was true she had heard of the elderly gentleman. Near enough!

As to the crowd of memories that kept coming, some absolutely clear, some mere phantoms, into the arena of Fenwick's still disordered mind, they would have an interest, and a strong one, for this story if its object were the examination of strange freaks of memory. But the only point we are nearly concerned with is the rigid barrier drawn across the backward pathway of his recollection at some period between ten and fifteen years ago. Till this should be removed, and the dim image of his forgotten marriage should acquire force and cohesion, he and his wife were safe from the intrusion of their former selves on the scene of their present happiness—safe possibly from a power of interference it might exercise for ill—safe certainly from risk of a revelation to Sally of her mother's history and her own parentage—but safe at a heavy cost to the one of the three who alone now held the key to their disclosure.

However vividly Fenwick had recalled the incidents of his arrival in England, and however convinced he was that no part of them was mere dream, they all belonged for him to that buried



Harrisson whose identity he shrank from taking on himself—*would* have shrunk from, at the cost that was to be paid for it, had the prize of its inheritance been ten times as great. Still, one or two connecting links had caught on either side, the chief one being Sally, who had actually spoken with him whilst still Harrisson—although it must be admitted she had not kissed him—and the one next in importance, the cabman. The pawn-broker made a very bad third—in fact, scarcely counted, owing to his own moroseness or reserve. But the cabman! Why, Fenwick had it all now at his fingers' ends. He could recall the start from New York, the wish to keep the secret of his gold-mining success to himself on the ship, and his satisfaction when he found his name printed with one *s* in the list of cabin passengers. Then a pleasant voyage on a summer Atlantic, and that nice young American couple whose acquaintance he made before they passed Sandy Hook, every penny of whose cash had been stolen on board, and how he had financed them, careless of his own ready cash. And how then, not being sure if he should go to London or to Manchester, he decided on the former, and wired his New York banker to send him *crédit*, prompt, at the bank he named in London; and then Livermore's Rents, 1808, and the joy of the cabman; and then the Twopenny Tube; and then Sally. He tried what he could towards putting in order what followed, but could determine nothing except that he stooped for the half-crown, and something struck him a heavy blow. Thereupon he was immediately a person, or a confusion, sitting alone in a cab, to whom a lady came whom he thought he knew, and to this lady he wanted to say, "Is that you?" for no reason he could now trace, but found he could scarcely articulate.

Recalling everything thus, to the full, he was able to supply links in the story that we have found no place for so far. For instance, the loss of a small valise on the boat that contained credentials that would have made it quite unnecessary for him to cable to New York for credit, and also an incident this reminded him of—that he had not only parted with most of his cash to the young Americans, but had given his purse to the lady to keep her share of it in, saying he had a very good cash pocket, and would have plenty of time to buy another, whereas *they* were hurrying through to catch the tidal boat for Calais. This accounted for that little new pocket-book without a card in it that had given no information at all. He could remember



having made so free with his cards on the boat and in the train that he had only one left when he got to Euston.

He found himself, as the hours passed, better and better able to dream and speculate about the life he now chose to imagine was Harrisson's property, not his ; and the more so the more he felt the force of the barrier drawn across the earlier part of it. Had the barrier remained intact, he might ultimately have convinced himself, for all practical purposes, that Harrisson's life was all dream. Yes, all a dream ! The cold and the gold of the Klondyke, the French Canadians at Ontario, four years on a cattle-ranch in California, five of unsuccessful attempts to practise at the American Bar—all, all a dream of another man named Harrisson, dreamed by Algernon Fenwick, that big hairy man at the wine-merchant's in Bishopsgate, who has a beautiful wife and a daughter who swims like a fish. One of the many might-have-beens that were not ! But a decision against its reality demanded time, and his revival of memory was only forty-eight hours old so far.

Of course, he would have liked, of all things, to make full confession, and talk it all out—this quasi-dream—to Rosalind ; but he could not be sure how much he could safely bring to light, how much would be best concealed. He could not run the *slightest* risk when the thing at stake was her peace of mind. No, no—Harrisson be hanged ! Him and his money, too.

So, though things kept coming to his recollection, he could hold his peace, and did so. There was nothing to come—not likely to be—that could unsay that revelation that he had been a married man, and did not know of his wife's death ; not even that he and she had been divorced, which would have been nearly as bad. He knew the worst of it, at any rate, and Rosalind need never know it if he kept it all to himself, best and worst.

So that day passed, and there was nothing to note about it, unless we mention that Sally was actually kept out of the Channel by Neptune's little white ponies aforesaid, which spoiled the swimming water—though, of course, it wasn't rough—backed by the fact that these little sudden showers wetted you through, right through your waterproof, before you knew where you were. Dr. Conrad came in as usual in the evening, reporting that his mother was "rather better." It was a discouraging habit she had, when she was not known to have been any worse than usual. This good lady always caught Commiseration

napping, if ever that quality took forty winks. The doctor was very silent this evening, imbibing Sally without comment. However, St. Sennans was drawing to a close for all others. That was enough to account for it, Sally thought. It was the last day but one, and poor Prosy couldn't be expected to accept her own view—that the awful jolliness of being back at Krakatoa Villa would even compensate—more than compensate—for the pangs of parting with the Saint. Sally's optimism was made of a stuff that would wash, or was all wool.

According to her own account, she had spent the whole day wondering whether the battle between Tishy and her mother had come off. She said so last thing of all to *her* mother as she decanted the melted paraffin of a bedroom candle whose wick, up to its neck therein, was unable to find a scope for its genius, and yielded only a spectral blue spark that went out directly if you carried it. Tilted over, it would lick in the end—this was Sally's testimony; and if you dropped the grease on the back of the soap-dish and thickened it up to a good blob, it would come off click when it was cold, and not make any mess at all.

"Yes, I've been wondering all day long," said she. "How I should enjoy being there to see! How freezing and dignified the Dragon will be! Mrs. Sales Wilson! Or perhaps she'll flare. (I wish this wick would; and it's such disgraceful waste of good candle!)"

"I do think, kitten, you're unkind to the poor lady. Just think how she must have dreamed about the splendid match her handsome daughter was going to make! And, you know, it *is* rather a come-down. . . ."

"Yes, of course it's a come-down. But I don't pity the Dragon one bit. She should have thought more of Tishy's happiness, and less of her grandeur. (It's just beginning; the flame will go white directly.)"

"She'd got some one else in view then?" Rosalind was quickly perceptive about it.

"Oh yes; don't you know? Sir Penderfield. (That'll do now, nicely; there's the white flame!) Sir Oughtred Penderfield. He's a Bart., of course. But he's a horror, and they say his father was even worse. Like father, like son! And the Dragon wanted Tishy to accept him."

At the name Rosalind shivered. The thought that followed it sent a knife-cut to her heart. This man that Sally had spoken of so unconsciously was *her brother*—at least, he was brother



enough to her by blood to make that thought a blade to penetrate the core of her mother's soul. It was a case for her strength to show itself in—a case for nettle-grasping with a vengeance. She would grasp this nettle directly ; but oh, for one moment—only one moment—just to be a little less sick with the slice of the chill steel ! just to quench the tremor she knew would come with her voice if she tried now to say, “ What was the name ? Tishy's *prétendu's*, I mean ; not his father's.”

But she could take the whole of a moment, and another, for that matter. So she left her words on her tongue's tip to say later, and felt secure that Sally would not look up and see the dumb white face she herself could see in the mirror she sat before. For, of course, she saw Sally's reflection, too, its still thoughtful eyelids half shrouded in a broken coil of black hair their owner's pearly teeth are detaining an end of, to stop it falling in the paraffin she is so intent on, as she watches it cooling on the soap-dish.

“ I've made it such a jolly big blob it'll take ever so long to cool. You can, you know, if you go gently. Only then the middle stops soft, and if you get in a hurry it spoils the clicket.” But it is hard enough now to risk moving the hair over it, and Sally's voice was free to speak as soon as her little white hand had swept the black coils back beyond the round white throat. Mrs. Lobjoit's mirror has its defects, apart from some of the quicksilver having been scratched off ; but Rosalind can see the merpussy's image plain enough, and knows perfectly well that before she looks up, she will reap the harvest of happiness she has been looking forward to. She will “ clicket ” off the “ blob ” with her finger.

The moment of fruition comes, and a filbert thumbnail spuds the hardened lozenge off the smooth glaze. “ There ! ” says Sally, “ didn't I tell you ? Just like ice. . . . What, mother ? ” For her mother's question had been asked, very slightly varied, in a nettle-grasping sense. She has had time to think.

“ *What* was Tishy's man's name—the other applicant ? Christian name, I mean ; not his father's.”

“ Sir Oughtred Penderfield. Why ? ”

“ I remember there was a small boy in India, twenty-two years ago, named Penderfield. Is Oughtred his only name ? ” The nettle-grasping there was in this ! Rosalind felt consoled by her own strength.

“ Can't say. He may have a dozen. Never seen him. Don't



want to ! But his hair's as black as mine, Tishy says. . . . I say, mother, *isn't* it deliciously smooth ?" But this refers to the paraffin lozenge, not to the hair.

"Yes, darling. Now I want to get to bed, if you've no objection."

"Certainly, mother darling ; but say I'm right about the Dragon and Sir Penderfield. Because I *am*, you know."

"Of course you are, chick. Only you never told me about him ; now, did you ?"

"Because I was so honourable. It was a secret. Very well, good night, then. . . . Oh, you poor mother ! how cold you are, and I've been keeping you up ! Good night !"

And off went Sally, leaving her mother to reason with herself about her own unreasonableness. After all, what was there in the fact that the little chap she remembered, seven years old, at the Residency at Khopal twenty odd years ago had grown up and inherited his father's baronetcy ? What was there in this to discompose and upset her, to make her breath catch and her nerves thrill ? A longing came on her that Gerry should not look in to say good night till she was in a position to refuse interviewing on the score of impending sleep. She made a dash for bed, and got the light out, out-generalling him by perhaps a minute.

What could she expect ? Not that little Tamerlane, as his father called him, should die just to be out of her path. It was no fault of his that he was his father's son, with—how could she doubt after what Sally had just said ?—the curse of his father's form of manhood or beasthood upon him. And yet, might it not have been better that he should have died, the innocent child she knew him, than live to follow his father's footsteps ? Better, best of all that the whole evil brood should perish and be forgotten. . . . Stop !

For the thought she had framed caught her breath and held it, caught her by the heart and checked its beating, caught her by the brain and stopped its thinking ; and she was glad when her husband's voice found her, dumb and stunned in the silence, and brought a respite to the unanswerable enigma she was face to face with.

"Hullo ! light out already ? Beg your pardon, darling. Good-night !"

"I wasn't asleep." So he came in and said good night officially and departed. His voice and his presence had staved off a night-

mare idea that was on the watch to seize on her—how if chance had brought Sally across this unsuspected relation of hers, and events had forced a full declaration of their kinship ? Somnus jumped at the chance given by its frustration ; the sea air asserted itself, and went into partnership with him, and Rosalind's mind was carried captive into dreamland.

But not before she had heard her husband stop singing to himself a German student's song as he closed his door on himself for the night.

“ War ich zum grossen Herrn geboren, wie Kaiser Maximilian. . . . ”

There could be no further unwelcome memories there, thank Heaven ! No mind oppressed by them could possibly sing, “ Kram-bam-bambuli, krambam-bu-li ! ”

## CHAPTER XL

THE next day the morning was bright and the sea was clear of Poseidon's ponies. They had gone somewhere else. Therefore, it behoved Mrs. Lobjoit to get breakfast quick, because it was absurd to expect anybody to go in directly after, and the water wouldn't be good later than half-past ten. Which Sally, coming downstairs at eight, impressed on Mrs. Lobjoit, who entered her own recognisances that it should appear as by magic the very minute your mamma came down. For it is one of the pleasures of anticipation-cf-a-joy-to-come to bring about its antecedents too soon, and so procure a blank period of unqualified existence to indulge Hope in without alloy. Even so, when true prudence wishes to catch a train, she orders her cab an hour before, and takes tickets twenty minutes before, and arrives on the platform eighteen minutes before there is the slightest necessity to do so; and then she stands on the said platform and lives for the train that is to be, and inquires of every guard, ticket-taker, and pointsman with respect to every linear yard of the platform edge, whether her train is going to come up there; and they ask each other questions, and give prismatic information; and then the train for Paradise (let us say) comes reluctantly backwards into the station with friends standing on its margin, and prudence seizes her valise and goes at a hand-gallop to the other end, where the *n*th class is, and is only just in time to get a corner seat.

So, though there was no fear of the tide going out as fast as the train for Paradise, Sally, relying on Mrs. Lobjoit, who had become a very old friend in eight weeks, felt she had done well to be beforehand, and, as breakfast would be twenty minutes, sat down to write a letter to Tishy. She wrote epistle-wise, heedless of style and stops, and as her mother was also twenty minutes—we are not responsible for these expressions—she wrote a heap of it. Then events thickened, as Fenwick, returning from



an early dip, met the postman outside, and came in bearing an expected letter, which Sally pounced upon.

"All about the row!" said she, attacking an impregnable corner of the envelope with a fork-point, in a fever of impatience to get at the contents. "Hang these envelopes! There, that's done it! Whatever they want to sticky them up so for I can't imagine. . . ."

"Get your breakfast, kitten, and read it after."

"I dare say. Catch me! No, I'm the sort that never waits for anything. . . . No, mummy darling; it shan't get cold. I can gormandise and read aloud both at once."

But she doesn't keep her promise, for she dives straight into an exploration ahead, and meanly says, "Just half a minute till I see what's coming," or, "Only to the end of this sentence," and also looks very keen and animated, and throws in short notes of exclamation and *well's* and *there's* and *think of that's*, till Fenwick enters a protest.

"Don't cheat, Sarah!" he says. "Play fair! If you won't read it aloud yourself, let somebody else."

"There's the first sheet to keep you quiet, Jeremiah!" Who, however, throws it over to Rosalind, who throws it back with a laugh.

"What a couple of big babies you two are!" she exclaims. "As if I couldn't possess my soul in peace for five minutes! Do put the letter by till you've had your breakfasts."

But this course was not approved, and the contents of Lætitia's epistle came out by fits and jerks and starts, and may be said to have been mixed with tea and coffee and eggs and bacon and toast. Perhaps we had better leave these out, and give the letter intact. Here it is:

"DEAREST SALLY,

"I am going to keep my promise, and write you a long letter at once, and tell you all about our reception at home. You will say it wasn't worth writing, especially as you will be back on Monday. However, a promise is a promise!

"We got to Victoria at seven, and were not so very late considering at G. Terrace; but when we had had something to eat I propounded my idea I told you of, that we should just go straight on, and beard mamma in her own den, and have it out. I knew I shouldn't sleep unless we did. Paggy said, 'Wouldn't it do as well if he called there to-morrow for the Strad—which

we had left behind last time as a connecting link to go and fetch away—and me to meet him as he came from the shop ?’ But surprise-tactics were better—I knew they would be—and now Paggy admits I was right.

“ Of course, Thomas stared when he saw who it was, and was going to sneak off without announcing us, and Fossett, who just crossed us in the passage, was perfectly comic. Pag said afterwards she was bubbling over with undemonstrativeness, which was clever for him. I simply said to Thomas that I thought he had better announce us, as we weren’t expected, and he asked who he was to announce, miss ! Actually, I was rather relieved when Pag said, ‘ Say Mr. and Mrs. Julius Bradshaw.’ I should have laughed, I know. Thomas looked a model of discretion that wouldn’t commit itself either way, and did as he was bid in an apologetic voice ; but he turned round on the stairs to say to me, ‘ I suppose you know, msam, there’s two ladies and a gentleman been dining here ?’ Because he began miss and ended ma’am, and then turned scarlet. Pag said after he thought Thomas wanted to caution us against a bigamist mamma was harbouring.

“ Papa was very nice, really. His allusion to our little escapade was the only one made, and might have meant nothing at all. ‘ Well, you’re a nice couple of people, upon my word !’ and then, seeing that mamma remained a block (which she can), he introduced Paggy to one of the two ladies as ‘ My son-in-law, Mr. Julius Bradshaw.’ I’m sure mamma gave a wooden snort and was ashamed of it before visitors, because she did another rather more probable one directly after, and pretended it was only that sort. Really, except a peck for me and saying *howd* and nothing more to Paggy, she kept herself to herself. But it didn’t matter, because of what happened. Really, it quite made me jump—I mean the way the lady Pag was introduced to rushed into his arms. I wasn’t sure I hadn’t better take him away at once. She was a celebrated German pianiste that had accompanied him in Paris. Mamma was at school with her at Frankfort. She had been inconsolable at the disappearance of the great Carissimi, whose playing of the Kreutzer was the only perfectly sympathetic one she had ever met. Was she never to play it with him again ? Alas, no ! for she was off to Vienna to-morrow, and then to New York, and if the ship went down she would never play the Kreutzer with Signore Carissimi again !

“ I saw papa’s eye looking mischievous, and then he pointed



to the Strad, where it was lying on the piano—locked up safe; we saw to that—and said there was Paganini's fiddle, why not play the *Cruet-stand*, or whatever you called it, *now*? Mamma found her voice, but lost her judgment, for she tried to block the performance on a fibby ground. Think how late it was, and how it would be keeping Madame von Höfenhoffer! She put her head in the lion's mouth there, for the Frau immediately said she would play all night rather than lose a note of Signore Carissimi. The other two went, and nobody wanted them. I've forgotten the woman's second husband's name—he's dead—but her son's the man I told you about. Of course, he hadn't expected to meet me, and I hope he felt like a fool. I was so glad it wasn't him, but Paggy. They played right through the Kreutzer, and didn't want the music, which couldn't be found, and then did bits again, and it was absolutely glorious. Even mamma (she's fond of music—it's her only good quality—and where should I get mine from if she wasn't?) couldn't stop quite stony, though she did her best, I promise you. As for papa, he was chuckling so over mamma's dilemma—because she wanted to trample on Paggy, and it *was* a dilemma—that he didn't care how long it went on. And do you know, dear, it *did* go on—one thing after another, that Frau glued to the clavier like a limpet not detachable without violence—till nearly one in the morning, having begun at ten about! And there was papa and Egerton and Theeny all sniggering at mamma, I know, in secret, and really proud of the connexion, if the truth were known. Mamma tried to get a little revenge by saying to me freezingly when the Höfenhoffer had gone: 'I suppose you are going home with Mr. Bradshaw, Lætitia? Good night.' And then she said *goodn* to Paggy just as she had said *howd*. I thought Paggy behaved so nicely. However, I'll tell you all about that on Monday.

"Papa was *very* nice—came out on the doorstep to say good night, and, do you know—it really *is* very odd; it must be the sea air—papa said to Paggy as we were starting: 'How's the head—the nerves, you know—eh, Master Julius?' And actually Paggy said: 'Why, God bless my soul, I had forgotten all about them!' Oh, Sally darling, just think! Suppose they got well, and all because I treated him to a honeymoon! Oh, my gracious, what a long letter!"

"There now! that *is* a letter and a half. 'With love from us both,' mine affectionately. And twelve pages! And Tishy's



hand's not so large, neither, as all that." This is Sally, as epilogue ; but her mother puts in a correction :

"It's thirteen pages. There's a bit on a loose page you haven't read." Sally has seen that, and it was nothing—so she says ; but Fenwick picks it up and reads it aloud :

"P.S.—Just a line to say I've remembered that name. She's Herrick—married a parson in India soon after her Penderfield husband died. She's great on reformatories."

Sally reread her letter with a glow of interest on her face and a passing approval or echo now and then. She noticed nothing unusual in either her mother or her stepfather ; but she did not look up, so absorbed was she.

Had she done so she might have wondered why her mother had gone so pale suddenly, and why there should be that puzzled absent look on the handsome face her eyes remained fixed on across the table ; but her own mind was far away, deep in her amusement at her friend's letter, full of her image of the disconcerted Dragon and the way Paganini and Beethoven in alliance had ridden rough-shod over Mrs. Grundy and social distinctions. She saw nothing, and finished a cup of coffee undisturbed, and asked for more.

Fenwick, caught by some memory or association he could not define or give its place to, for the moment looked at neither of his companions. Rosalind, only too clear about all the postscript of the letter had brought before her own mind, saw reason to dread its effect on his. The linking of the name of Penderfield and that of the clergyman who had married them at Umballa—a name that, two days since, had had a familiar sound to him when she incautiously uttered it—was using Suggestion to bait a trap for Memory. She felt she was steering through shoal-waters perilously near the wind ; but she made no attempt to break his reverie. She might do as much harm as good. She only watched his face, feeling its contrast to that of the absorbed and happy merpussy, rejoicing in the fortunate outcome of her friend's anxieties.

It was a great relief when, with a deep breath and a shake, akin to a horse's when the flies won't take a hint, Fenwick flung off the oppression, whatever it was, and came back into the living world on a stepping-stone of the back-talk.

"Well done, Paganini ! Nothing like it since Orpheus and Eurydice—only this time it was Proserpine, not Pluto, that had

to be put to sleep. . . . What's the matter, darling ? Anything wrong ?"

"Nothing at all. I was looking at you."

"Well, *I'm* all right !" And Sally looked up from her letter for a moment to say, "There's nothing the matter with Jeremiah," and went on reading as before. Sally's attitude about him always implied a kind of proprietorship, as in a large, fairly well-behaved dog. Rosalind felt glad she had not looked at *her*.

Presently Fenwick said : "Now, who's coming for a walk with me ?" But Sally was off directly to find the Swiss girl she sometimes bathed with, and Rosalind thought it would be nice in a sheltered place on the beach. She really wanted to be alone, and knew the shortest way to this was to sit still, especially in the morning ; but Gerry had better get Vereker to go for a walk. Perhaps she would look in at his mother's later. So Fenwick, after a customary caution to Sally not to drown herself, went away to find Conrad, as he generally called him now.

Rosalind was shirking a problem she dared not face from a cowardly conviction of its insolubility. What would she do if Gerry should, without some warning, identify her ? She had to confess to herself that she had no clue at all to the effect it would have, coming suddenly, on him. She could at least imagine aspects, attitudes, tones of voice for him if it came slowly ; but she could not supply any image of him, under other circumstances, not more or less founded on her recollections of twenty years ago. Might she not lose him again, as she lost him then ? She *must* get nearer to safety than she was now. Was she not relying on the house not catching fire instead of negotiating insurance policies or providing fire extinguishers ?

She would go and sit under the shelter of one of the many unemployed machines—for only a few daring spirits would follow Sally's example to-day—and try to think it out. Just a few instructions to Mrs. Lobjoit, and a word or two of caution to Gerry not to fall over cliffs, or to get run over at level-crossings or get sunstrokes, or get cold, etc., and she would fall back on her own society and think. . . .

Yes, that was the question ! Might she not lose him again ? And if she did, how live without him ? . . . Oh yes, she would be no worse off than before, in a certain sense. She would have Sally still . . . but. . . .

Which would be the worse ? The loss of the husband whom every day taught her to love more dearly, or the task of ex-



plaining the cause of her loss to Sally ? The one she fixed her mind on always seemed intolerable. As for the other contingencies—difficulties of making all clear to friends, and so forth—let them go ; they were not worth a thought. But she *must* be beforehand, and know how to act, how to do her best to avert both, if the thing she dreaded came to pass. . . .

There now ! Here she was settled under the lee of a machine—happily the shadow-side, for the sun was warm—and the white foam of the undertow was guilty of a tremendous glare—the one the people who can't endure the seaside get neuralgia from—and Sally was going to come out of the second machine directly in the Turkey-twill knickers, and find her way through the selvage-wave and the dazzle, or get knocked down and have to try back. Surely Rosalind, instead of saying over and over again that she *must* be ready to meet the coming evil, possibly close at hand, ought to make a serious effort to become so. She found herself, even at this early hour of the day, tired with the strain of a misgiving that an earthquake was approaching ; and as those who have lived through earthquakes become unstrung at every slightest tremor of the earth's crust beneath them, so she felt that the tension begun with that recurrence of two days ago had grown and grown, and threatened to dominate her mind, to the exclusion of all else. Every little thing, such as the look on her husband's face half an hour ago, made her say to herself, as the earthquake-haunted man says at odd times all through the day and night, "Is this *it* ? Has it come ?" and she saw before her no haven of peace.

What was it now she really most feared ? Simply the effect of the revelation on her husband's mind—an effect no human creature could make terms with. She was not the least afraid of anything he could say or do, delirium apart ; but see what delirium had made of him—she was sure it was so—in that old evil hour when he had flung her from him and gone away in anger to try to get her sentence of banishment ratified. How could she guard against a repetition, in some form or other, of the disastrous errors of that unhappy time ?

As we know, she was still in ignorance of all the revived memories he had told to Vereker ; but she knew there had been something—disjointed, perhaps, and not to be relied on, as the doctor had said, but none the less to be feared on that account, She had seen the effect of his sleepless night before he went away with Vereker, and knew it to be connected with mental dis-



turbance outside and beyond mere loss of rest ; and she had an uneasy sense that something was being kept from her. She could not but believe Gerry's cheerfulness was partly assumed. Had he been quite at ease about his recollections, surely he would have told them to *her*. Then this had all come on the top of that Kreutzkammer one. The most upsetting thing of all, though, was the change that had come over him suddenly at breakfast, just after he had read aloud the name Herrick—a name he had seemed not free from memory of when her tongue was betrayed into speaking it—and the name Penderfield. If it was due to this last, so much the worse ! It was the name of all others that was best for oblivion.

How hard it seemed that it must needs force itself to the fore in this way ! Its present intrusion into her life and surroundings was utterly unconnected with anything in the past. Sally's friendship with Lætitia began in a music-class six years ago. The Sales Wilsons were people to all appearance as un-Indian as any folk need be. Why must Sally's friend, of all others, be the object of its owner's unwelcome admiration ? To think, too, how near she had been to a precipice without knowing it ! Suppose she had come face to face with that woman again ! To be sure, her intercourse with Ladbroke Grove Road was limited to one stiff exchange of calls in "the season." Still, it might have happened . . . but where was the use of begging and borrowing troubles ?

Was it, or was it not, the fact, she asked herself, that now, after all these years, she thought of this woman as worse than her husband, the iniquity of the accomplice as more diabolical than that of the principal ? She found she could not answer this in the negative off-hand. The paradox was also before her that that incorrigible amphibious treasure of hers, whose voice was even now shouting to her more timorous friend from beyond the selvage-wave she had just contemptuously dived through—that that Sally, inexchangeable for anything she could conceive or imagine, must needs have been something quite other than she was, had she come of any other technical paternity than the accursed one she had to own to. Was there some terrible law in Nature that slow forgiveness of the greatest wrong that can be wrought must perforce be granted to its inflictor, through the gracious survivor of a brutal indifference that would almost add to his crime, if that were possible ? If so, surely the Universe must be the work of an Almighty Fiend, a Demiurgus with a

cruel heart, and this the masterstroke of all his cunning. But what, in Heaven's name, was the use of bruising her brains against the conundrums of the great unanswered metaphysical sphinx? Better be contented with the easy vernacular solution of the rhymester:

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Evils from circumstances grow.”

Because she felt she was getting no nearer the solution of her own problem, and was, if anything, wandering from the point.

Another way of looking at the matter was beginning to take form; had hung about her mind and forsaken it more than once. Might it not be better, after all, to dash at the position and capture it while her forces were well under control? To pursue the metaphor, the commissariat might not hold out. Better endure the ills we have—of course, Rosalind knew all that—than fly to others that we know not of. But suppose we have a chance of flying to others we can measure the length and breadth of, and staving off thereby an uncalculable unknown? She felt she almost knew the worst that could come of taking Gerry into her confidence, telling him boldly all about himself, provided she could choose her opportunity and make sure Sally was well out of the way. The concealment from Sally was the achievement whose failure involved the greatest risk. Her husband's mind would bear the knowledge of his story well or ill according to the way in which it reached him; but the necessity of keeping her girl in ignorance of it was a thing absolute. Any idea that Sally's origin could be concealed from her, and her stepfather's identity made known, Rosalind dismissed as simply fantastic.

A lady who had established herself below high-water mark with many more books than she could read, and plant capable of turning out much more work than she could do, at this point fled for safety from a rush of white foam. It went back for more, meaning to wet her through next time; but had to bear its disappointment. Mrs. Arkwright—for it was Gwendolen's mamma—being driven from the shadow of the breakwater, cast about her for a new lodgment, and perceived one beside Mrs. Fenwick, whom she thought very well for the seaside, but not to leave cards on. *Might* she come up there, beside you? Rosalind didn't want her, but had to pretend she did, to encourage her advent. It left behind it a track of skeins and volumes,



which had trickled from the fugitive, but were recovered by a domestic, and pronounced dry. Besides, they were only library books, and didn't matter.

"I haven't seen you since the other day on the pier, Mrs. Fenwick, or I wanted to have asked you more about that charming young couple, the Julian Attwoods. Oh dear! I knew I should get the name wrong. . . . *Bradshaw!* Yes, of course." Her vivid perception of what the name really is, when apprised of it, almost amounts to a paroxysm. You see, on the pier that day, she made a bad blunder over those Bradshaw people, and though she consoled her conscience by admitting to her husband that she had "*mis les pieds dans le plat*," still, she thought, if she was actually going to plump down on Mrs. Fenwick's piece of beach, she ought to do a little more apology. By the bye, why is it that ladies of her sort always resort to snippets of French idiom, whenever they get involved in a quagmire of delicacy—or indelicacy, as may be? Will Gwendolen grow like her mother? However, that doesn't concern us now.

A little stiffness on Rosalind's part was really due to her wish to be by herself, but Mrs. Arkwright ascribed it to treasured resentment against her blunders of two days since. Now, she was a person who could never let anything drop—a tugging person. She proceeded to develop the subject.

"Really a most interesting story! I need hardly say that my informants had given me no particulars. Very old friends of my husband's. Quite possible they really knew nothing of this young gentleman's musical gifts. Simply told my husband the tale as I told it to you. Just that the daughter of an old friend of theirs, Professor Sales Wilson—the Professor Sales Wilson—of course, quite a famous name in literature—scholarship—that sort of thing—had run away with a shopman! That was what my husband heard, you know. I merely repeated it."

"Wasn't it, as things go, rather a malicious way of putting it—on their part?"

Mrs. Arkwright gave sagacious nods, indicative of comfortable "*we-know-the-world-we-live-in-and-won't-pretend*" relationships between herself and the speaker. They advertised perfect mutual understanding on a pinnacle of married experience. Fancy there being any need for anything else between *us!* they said. Their editor then supplied explanatory text: "Of course there may have been a *soupçon* of personal feeling in the case—bias, pique, whatever one likes to call it. You know, dear Mrs.



Fenwick ?” But Mrs. Fenwick waited for further illumination. “Well, you know . . . I suppose it’s rather a breach of confidence, only I know I shall be safe with *you*. . . .”

“Don’t tell me any secrets, Mrs. Arkwright. I’m not safe.” But Mrs. Arkwright was not a person to be put off in this way. Not she ! She meant elucidation, and nothing short of bayonets would stop her.

“Well, really, perhaps I’m making it of too much importance to talk of breaches of confidence. After all, it only amounts to a gentleman having been disappointed. Of course, his relations would . . . don’t you see ? . . .”

“Was it some man that was after Tishy ?” asked Rosalind, wondering how many more rejected suitors were wearing the willow about the haberdasher’s bride. She had heard of one, only last night. She was not putting two and two together.

“I dare say everybody knows it, and it’s only my nonsensical caution. But one does get *so* timorous of saying anything. *You* know, dear Mrs. Fenwick ! However, it’s better to say it out now—of course, quite between ourselves, you know. It was Mrs. Samuel Herrick’s son, Sir Charles Penderfield. He’s the present baronet, you know. Father was in the army—rather distinguished man, I fancy. Her second husband was a clergyman. . . .” Here followed social analysis, some of which Rosalind could have corrected. The speaker floundered a little among county families, and then resumed the main theme. “Mrs. Herrick is a sort of connexion of my husband’s (I don’t exactly know what ; but then, I never *do* know—family is such a bore), and it was *she* told *him* all about this. I always forget these things when they’re told *me*. But I can quite understand that the young man’s mother, in speaking of it . . . *you* understand ? . . .”

“Oh, of course, naturally. I think my daughter’s coming out. I saw her machine-door move.” Rosalind began collecting herself for departure.

“But, of course, you won’t repeat any of this—but, of course, I know I can rely upon you—but, of course, it doesn’t really matter. . . .” A genial superior tone of toleration for mankind’s foibles as seen by the two speakers from an elevation comes in at this point juicily. It meets an appreciative response in the prolonged first syllable of Rosalind’s “*Certainly*. I never should dream,” etc., whose length makes up for an imperfect finish—a dispersal of context from which a farewell good morning

emerges clear, hand-in-hand with a false statement that the speaker has enjoyed sitting there talking.

Rosalind had not enjoyed it at all. She was utilising the merpussy's return to land as a means of escape, because, had there been no Mrs. Arkwright, and no folk-chatter, Sally would have come scranching up the shingle, and flung herself down beside her mother. As it was, Rosalind's "Oh, *I am* so glad to get away from that woman!" told a tale. And Sally's truthful soul interpreted the upshot of that tale as prohibitive of merely going away and sitting down elsewhere. She and her mother were in honour bound to have promised to meet somebody somewhere—say, for instance, Mrs. Vereker and her son and donkey-chair. Sally said it, for instance, seeing something of the sort would soothe the position; and the two of them met the three, or rather the three and a half, for we had forgotten the boy to whom the control of the donkey was entrusted, and whose interpretation of his mission was to beat the donkey incessantly like a carpet, and to drag it the other way. The last held good of all directions soever. Which the donkey, who was small, but by nature immovable, requited by taking absolutely no notice whatever of his exertions.

"What's become of my step-parent? I thought he was going to take you for a walk." So spoke Sally to Dr. Conrad as she and her mother met the three others, and the half. The doctor replied:

"He's gone for a walk along the cliff by himself. I would have gone. . . ." The doctor pauses a moment till the donkey-chair is a few paces ahead, accompanied by Mrs. Fenwick. "I would have gone, only, you see, it's just mother's last day or two. . . ." Sally apprehends perfectly. But he shouldn't have dropped his voice. He was quite distant enough to be inaudible by the Octopus as far as overhearing words went. But anyone can hear when a voice is dropped suddenly, and words are no longer audible. Dr. Conrad is a very poor Machiavelli, when all is said and done.

"I can hear *every word* my boy is saying to your girl, Mrs. Fenwick." This is delivered with exemplary sweetness by the Octopus, who then guesses with diabolical acumen at almost the exact wording of her son's speech. Apparently, no amount of woollen wraps, no double thickness of green veil to keep the glare out, no smoked glasses with flanges to make it harmless if it gets in, can obscure the Goody's penetrative powers when



invoked for the discomfiture of her kind. "But does not my dear boy know," she continues gushily, "that I am *always* content to be *alone* as long as I can be *sure* that he is happily employed *elsewhere*. I am a *dull old woman*, I know; but, at least, my wish is not to be a burden. That was the wish of my great-aunt Eliza—your great-great-aunt, Conrad; you never saw her—in her last illness. I borrow her expression—'not to be a burden.' " The Octopus, having seized her prey in this tentacle, was then at liberty to enlarge upon the unselfish character of her great-aunt, reaping the advantages of a vicarious egoism from an hypnotic suggestion that that character was also her own. The great-aunt had, it appeared, lost the use, broadly speaking, of her anatomy, and could only communicate by signs; but when she died she was none the less missed by her own circle, whose grief for her loss took the form of a tablet. The speaker paused a moment for her hearers to contemplate the tablet, and perhaps ask for the inscription, when Sally saw an opening, and took advantage of it.

"Dr. Conrad's going to be very selfish this afternoon, Mrs. Vereker, and come with us to Chalke, where that dear little church is that looks like a barn. I mean to find the sexton and get the key this time."

"My dear, I shall be *perfectly* happy knitting. Do not trouble about me for one moment. I shall think how you are enjoying yourselves. When I was a girl there was nothing I enjoyed more than ransacking old churches. . . ."

And so forth. Rosalind felt almost certain that Sally either said or telegraphed to the doctor, who was wavering, "You'll come, you know. Now, mind; two-thirty punc.," and resolved, if he did *not* come, to go to Iggulden's and extract him from the tentacles of his mamma, and remain entangled herself, if necessary.

In fact, this was how the arrangement for the afternoon worked out. Dr. Conrad did *not* turn up, as expected, and Rosalind carried out her intention. She rescued the doctor, and sent him round to join her husband and Sally, promising to follow shortly and catch them up. The three started to walk, but Fenwick, after a little slow walking to allow Rosalind to overtake them, had misgivings that she had got caught, and went back to rescue her, telling Sally and the doctor it was no use to wait—they would follow on, and take their chance. And the programme so indicated was acted on.



## CHAPTER XLI

LOVE, like a thunderstorm, is very much more intelligible in its beginnings—to its chronicler, at least—than it becomes when it is, so to speak, overhead. We all know the clear-cut magnificence of the great thunder-cloud against the sky, its tremendous deliberation, its hills and valleys of curdling mist, fraught with God knows what potential of destruction in volts and ohms; the ceaseless muttering of its wrath as it speaks to its own heart, and its sullen secrets reverberate from cavern to cavern in the very core of its innermost blackness. We know the last prismatic benedictions of the sun it means to hide from us—the strange gleams of despairing light on the other clouds—clouds that are not in it, mere outsiders or spectators. We can remember them after we have got home in time to avoid a wetting, and can get our moist water-colours out and do a recollection of them before they go out of our heads—or think we can.

But we know, too, that there comes a time of a sudden wind and agitated panic of the trees, and then big, warm preliminary drops, and then the first clap of thunder, clear in its own mind and full of purpose. Then the first downpour of rain, that isn't quite so clear, and wavers for a breathing-space, till the tart reminder of the first swift, decisive lightning-flash recalls it to its duty, and it becomes a steady, intolerable torrent that empties roads and streets of passers-by, and makes the gutters rivulets. And then the storm itself—flash upon flash—peal upon peal—up to the blinding and deafening climax, glare and thunderbolt in a breath. And then it's overhead, and we are sure something has been struck that time.

It was all plain sailing, two days since, in the love-storm we want the foregoing sketch of a thunderstorm to illustrate, that was brewing in the firmament of Conrad Vereker's soul. At the point corresponding to the first decisive clap of thunder—wherever it was—Chaos set in in that firmament. And Chaos was developing

rapidly at the time when the doctor, rescued by Sally's intrepidity from the maternal clutch, started on what he believed would be his last walk with his idol at St. Sennans. Now he knew that, when he got back to London, though there might be, academically speaking, opportunities of seeing Sally, it wasn't going to be the same thing. That was the phrase his mind used, and we know quite well what it meant.

Of course, when some peevish author or invalid sends out a servant to make you take your organ farther off, a good way down the street, you can begin again exactly where you left off, lower down. But a barrel-organ has no soul, and one has one oneself, usually. Dr. Vereker's soul, on this occasion, was the sport of the love-storm of our analogy, and was tossed and driven by whirlwinds, beaten down by torrents, dazzled by lightning and deafened by thunder, out of reach of all sane record by the most eloquent of chroniclers. It was not in a state to accept calmly the idea of transference to Shepherd's Bush. A tranquil mind would have said, "By all means, go home and start afresh." But no; the music in this case refused to welcome the change. Still, he would forget it—make light of it and ignore it—to enjoy this last little expedition with Sally to the village church across the downs, that had been so sweetly decorated for the harvest festival. A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush. *Carpe diem!*

So Dr. Conrad seemed to have grown younger than ever when he and Sally got away from all the world, after Fenwick had fallen back to rescue the captive, octopus-caught. Whereat Sally's heart rejoiced; for this young man's state of subordination to his skilful and overwhelming parent was a constant thorn in her side. To say she felt for him is to say nothing. To say that she would have jumped out of her skin with joy at hearing that he was engaged to that young lady, unknown; and that that young lady had successfully made terms of capitulation, involving the disbanding of the Goody, and her ultimate dispersal to Bedford Park with a companion—to vouch for this actually happening might be rash. But Sally told herself—and her mother, for that matter—that she should so jump out of her skin; and you may believe her, perhaps. We happen not to; but it may have been true, for all that.

Agur, the son of Jakeh (Prov. xxx.) evidently thought the souls of women not worth analysis, and the way of a maid with a man not a matter for Ithiel and Ucal to spend time and thought

over, as they seem to have said nothing to King Solomon on the subject. But then Agur candidly admitted that he was more brutish than any man, and had not the understanding of a man. So he contented himself with wondering at the way of a man with a maid, and made no remarks about the opposite case. Even with the understanding of a man, would he have been any nearer seeing into the mystery of a girl's heart? As for ourselves, we give it up. We have to be content with watching what Miss Sally will do next, not trying to understand her.

She certainly *believed* she believed—we may go that far—when she started to walk to Chalke Church with a young man she felt a strong interest in, and wanted to see happily settled in life—(all her words, please, not ours)—that she intended, this walk, to get out of Prosy who the young lady was that he had hinted at, and, what was more, she knew exactly how she was going to lead up to it. Only she wouldn't rush the matter; it would do just as well, or better, after they had seen the little church, and were walking back in the twilight. They could be jolly and chatty then. Oh yes, certainly a good deal better. As for any feeling of shyness about it, of relief at postponing it—what *nonsense!* Hadn't they as good as talked it all over already? But, for our own part, we believe that this readiness to let the subject wait was a concession Sally made towards admitting a personal interest in the result of her inquiry—so minute a one that maybe you may wonder why we call it a concession at all. Dr. Conrad was perhaps paltering a little with the truth, too, when he said to himself that he was quite prepared to fulfil his half-promise to Fenwick and reveal his mind to Sally; but not till quite the end of this walk, in case he should spoil it, and upset Sally. Or, perhaps, to-morrow morning, on the way to the train. Our own belief is, he was frightened, and it was an excuse.

“We shall go by the beech-forest,” was Sally's last speech to Fenwick, as he turned back on his mission of rescue. And twenty minutes later she and Dr. Conrad were crossing the smooth sheep-pasture that ended at the boundary of the said forest—a tract of woodland that was always treated with derision on account of its acreage. It was small, for a forest, certainly; but, then, it hadn't laid claim to the name itself. Sally spoke forgivingly of it as they approached it.

“It's a handy little forest,” said she; “only you can't lie down in it without sticking out. If you don't expect to, it doesn't matter.” This was said without a trace of a smile, Sally-



fashion. It took its reasonableness for granted, and allowed the speaker to continue without a pause into conversation sane and unexaggerated.

"What were you and Jeremiah talking about the day before yesterday, when you went that long walk?"

"We talked about a good many things. I've forgotten half."

"Which was the one you don't want me to know about? Because you haven't forgotten that, you know." Vereker thinks of Sally's putative parents, the Arcadian shepherdess and the thunderbolt. Obviously a reality! Besides—so ran the doctor's thought—with her looking like *that*, what can I do? He felt perfectly helpless, but wouldn't confess it. He would make an effort. One thing he was certain of: that evasion, with those eyes looking at him, would mean instant shipwreck.

"We had a long talk, dear Miss Sally, about how much Jeremiah"—a slight accent on the name has the force of inverted commas in text—"can really recollect of his own history." But Sally's reply takes a form of protest, without seeming warranty.

"I say, Dr. Conrad, I wish you wouldn't... However, never mind that now. I want to know about Jeremiah. Has he remembered a lot more, and not told?"

"He goes on recovering imperfect versions of things. He told me a good many such yesterday—so imperfect that I am convinced as his mind clears he will find that some of them, though founded on reality, are little better than dreams. He can't rely on them himself.... But what is it you wish I wouldn't?"

"Oh, nothing!—I'll tell you after. Never mind that now. What are the things—I mean, the things he recovers the imperfect versions of? You needn't tell me the versions, you know, but you might tell me what they were versions of, without any breach of confidence." Dr. Conrad has not time for more than a word or two towards the obvious protest against this way of stating the case, before Sally becomes frankly aware of her own unfairness. "No, I won't worm out and inquisit," she says—and we are bound to give her exact language. "It isn't fair on a general practitioner to take him for a walk and get at his professional secrets." The merry eyebrows and the pearly teeth, slightly in abeyance for a serious moment or two, are all in evidence again as the black eyes flash round on the doctor, and, as it were, convey his reprieve to him. He acknowledges it in this sense.

"I'm glad you don't insist upon my telling, Miss Sally. If you had insisted, I should have had to tell." He paused a second, drawing an inference from an expression of Sally's face, then added : " Well, it's true. . . ."

"I wasn't thinking of that." This refers to her intention to say something, which never fructified; but somehow got communicated, magnetically perhaps, to Dr. Conrad. "Never mind what, now. Because if your soles are as slippery as mine are, we shall never get up. Catch hold!"

This last refers to the necessity two travellers are under, who, having to ascend a steep escarpment of slippery grass, can only do so by mutual assistance. Sally and the doctor got to the top, and settled down to normal progress on a practicable gradient, and all the exhilaration of the wide, wind-swept downland. But what had been to the unconscious merpussy nothing but a mutual accommodation imposed by a common lot—common subjection to the forces of gravitation and the extinction of friction by the reaction of short grass on leather—had been to her companion a phase of stimulus to the storm that was devastating the region of his soul; a new and prolonged peal of thunder swift on the heels of a blinding lightning-flash, and a deluge to follow such as a real storm makes us run to shelter from. On Dr. Conrad's side of the analogy, there was no shelter, and he didn't ask for it. Had he asked for anything, it would have been for the power to tell Sally what she had become to him, and a new language he did not now know in which to tell it. And such a vocabulary!

But Dr. Conrad didn't know how simple the language was that he felt the want of—least of all, that there was only one word in its vocabulary. And when the two of them got to the top of their slippery precipice, breathless, he was no nearer the disclosure he had made up his mind to, and as good as promised Fenwick to make, than when they were treading the beechmast and listening to the wood-doves in the handy little forest they had left below. But oh, the little things in this life that are the big ones all the while, and no one ever suspects them!

A very little thing indeed was to play a big part, unacknowledged till after, in the story of this walk. For it chanced that as they reached the hill-top the diminution of the incline was so gradual that at no exact point could the lease of Sally's hand to that of the doctor be determined by either landlord or tenant. We do not mean that he refused to let go, nor that Sally consciously said to herself that it would be rude to snatch back the



gloveless six-and-a-half that she had entrusted to him, the very minute she didn't want his assistance. It was a *nuance* of action or demeanour far, far finer than that on the part of either. But it was real all the same. And the facts of the case were as clear to Sally's subconsciousness, unadmitted and unconfessed, as though Dr. Conrad had found his voice then and there, and said out boldly: "There is *no* young lady I am wavering about except it be you; she's a fiction, and a silly one. There is no one in the world I care for as I do for you. There is nothing in the world that I can name or dream of so precious to me as this hand that I now give up with reluctance, under the delusion that I have not held it long enough to make you guess the whole of the story." All that was said, but what an insignificant little thing it was that said it!

As for Miss Sally, it was only her subself that recognised that any one had said anything at all. Her superself dismissed it as a fancy; and, therefore, being put on its mettle to justify that action, it pointed out to her that, after that, it would be the merest cowardice to shirk finding out about Dr. Conrad's young lady. She would manage it somehow by the end of this walk. But still an element of postponement came in, and had its say. Yet it excited no suspicions in her mind, or she ignored them. She was quite within her rights, technically, in doing so.

It was necessary, though, to tide over the momentary reciprocity—the slight exchange of consciousnesses that, if indulged, must have ended in a climax—with a show of stiffness; a little pretence that we were a lady and gentleman taking a walk, otherwise undescribed. When the doctor relinquished Sally's hand, he felt bound to ignore the fact that hers went on ringing like a bell in the palm of his, and sending musical messages up his arm; and to talk about dewponds. They occur on the tops of downs, and are very scientific. High service and no rate are the terms of their water-supply. Dr. Conrad knew all about them, and was aware that one they passed was also a relic of prehistoric man, who had dug it, and didn't live long enough, poor fellow! to know it was a dewpond, or prehistoric. Sally was interested. A little bird with very long legs didn't seem to care, and walked away without undue hurry, but amazingly quickly, for all that.

"What a little darling!" Sally said. "Did you hear that delicious little noise he made? Isn't he a water-ouzel?" Sally took the first name that she thought sounded probable. She really was making talk, to contribute her share to the fiction about



the lady and gentleman. So was her companion. He reflected for a moment whether he could say anything about Grallæ and Scolopacidæ, or such like, but decided against heaping up instructive matter on the top of the recent dewponds. He gave it up, and harked back quite suddenly to congenial personalities.

“What was it you wished I wouldn’t, Miss Sally?”

Our Sally had it on her lips to say, “Why, do *that*—call me Miss Sally, of course! I can’t *tell* you how I hate it.” But, this time, she was seized with a sudden fit of shyness. She could have said it quite easily before that trivial hand-occurrence, and the momentary stiffness that followed it. Now she backed out in the meanest way, and even sought to fortify the lady and gentleman pretext. She looked back over the panorama they were leaving behind, and discerned that that was Jeremiah and her maternal parent coming through the clover-field. But it wasn’t, palpably. Nevertheless, Sally held tight to her groundless opinion long enough for the previous question to be droppable, without effrontery. Then her incorrigible candour bubbled up, and she refused to take advantage of her own subterfuge.

“Never mind, Dr. Conrad; I’ll tell you presently. I’ve a bone to pick with you. Wait till we’ve seen the little churchy-wurchy—there it is, over there, with a big weathercock—and then we can quarrel and go home separate.”

Even Agur, the son of Jakeh, would have seen, at this point, the way that this particular maid, in addressing this particular man, was exaggerating a certain spirit of bravado; and if he had been accompanying them unseen from St. Sennans, would certainly have deserved his own self-censure if he had failed to trace this spirit to its source—the hand-incident. We believe it was only affectation in Agur, and that he knew all about the subject, men, maids, and every other sort; only he didn’t think any of the female sorts worth his Oriental consideration. It was a far cry to the dawn of Browning in those days.

Down the hill to the flatlands was a steep pathway, where talk paused naturally. When you travel in single file on a narrow footway with a grass slide to right or left of you, which it does not do to tread on with shoe-soles well polished on two miles of previous grass, you don’t talk—especially if you have come to some point in talk where silence is not unwelcome. Sally and the doctor said scarcely a dozen words on the way down to the little village that owned the name and the church of Chalke. When they arrived in its seclusion they found, for purposes of

information and reference, no human creatures visible except some absolutely brown, white-haired ones whose existence dated back only a very few years—not enough to learn English in. So, when addressed, they remained a speechless group, too unaccustomed to man to be able to say where keys of churches were to be had, or anything else. But the eldest, a very little girl in a flexible blue bonnet, murmured what Sally, with insight, interpreted into a reference.

“Yes, dear, that’s right. You go and tell moarther t’ whoam that a lady and gentleman want to see inside the church, and ask for the key.” Whereupon the little maid departs down a passage into a smell of wallflowers, and is heard afar rendering her message as a long narrative—so long that Dr. Conrad says the child cannot have understood right, and they had better prosecute inquiry further. Sally thinks otherwise, and says men are impatient fidgets.

The resolute dumbness of one of the small natives must have been a *parti-pris*, for it suddenly disappeared during his sister’s absence, and he gave a narrative of a family dissension, not necessarily recent. He appeared proud of his own share in it, which Sally nevertheless felt she could not appear to sanction by silence.

“You bad little boy,” she said. “You smacked your sister Elizabeth in t’ oy, and your foarther smacked you. I hope he hurt.” The bad little boy assented with a nod, and supplied some further details. Then he asked for a penny before his sister Elizabeth came back. He wanted it to buy almond-rock, but he wouldn’t give any of it to Jacob, nor to his sister Elizabeth, nor to Reuben, nor to many others, whom he seemed to exclude from almond-rock with rapture. Asked to whom he would give some, then, he replied: “Not you—eat it moyself!” and laughed heartlessly. Sally, we regret to say, gave this selfish little boy a penny for not being hypocritical. And then his sister Elizabeth reappeared with the key, which was out of scale with her, like St. Peter’s.

The inward splendours of this church had been inferred by Sally from a tiptoe view through the window, which commanded its only archaic object of interest—the monument of a wool-stapler who, three hundred and odd years ago, had the effrontery to have two wives and sixteen children. He ought to have had one or two more wives, thought Dr. Conrad. However, the family was an impressive one now, decorated as it was with roses cut out



of turnips, and groups of apples and carrots and cereals. And no family could have kneeled down more symmetrically, even in 1580.

But there was plenty to see in that church, too. Indeed, it was for all the world like the advertisement sheets of *Architectonic Ecclesiology* (ask for this paper at your club), and every window was brim full of new stained glass, and every inch of floor-space was new encaustic tiles. And, what was more, there was a new mosaic over the chancel-arch—a modest and wobbly little arch in itself, that seemed afflicted with its position, and to want to get away into a quiet corner and meditate. Sally said so, and added so should she, if she were it.

“I wonder if the woolstapler was married here to one or other of the little square women,” said she.

“I wonder why the angels up there look so sulky,” said Dr. Conrad. And then Sally, who seemed absent-minded, found something else to wonder about—a certain musical whistling noise that filled the little church. But it was only a big bunch of moonwort on a stained-glass-window sill, and the wind was blowing through a vacancy that should have been a date, and making Æolian music. The little maid with the key found her voice over this suddenly. Her bruvver had done that, she said with pride. He had oymed a stoo-an when it was putten up, and brokken t’ glass. So that stained glass was very new indeed, evidently.

“I wonder why they call that stuff ‘honesty,’ Miss Sally?” said the doctor. Sally, feeling that the interest of either in the church was really perfunctory, said vaguely—did they? And then, recoiling from further wonderment, and, indeed, feeling some terror of becoming idiotic if this sort of thing went on much longer, she exclaimed, with reality in her voice: “Because it’s not pretending to take an interest when it doesn’t, like us. But I wish you wouldn’t, Dr. Conrad; I do hate it so.”

“Hate what? Taking an interest or calling it honesty? I didn’t call it honesty. *They* did, whoever they are!”

“No, no—I don’t mean that. Never mind. I’ll tell you when we’re out. Come along—that is, if you’ve seen enough of the tidy mosaic and the tidy stained glass, and the tidy nosegays on the tidy table.” The doctor came along—seemed well satisfied to do so. But this was the third time Sally had wished that Dr. Conrad wouldn’t, and this time she felt she must explain. She wasn’t at all sure that the name of that herb hadn’t somehow



got into the atmosphere—caught on, as it were, and twitted her. After all, why shouldn't she speak a plain thought to an old friend, as poor Prosy was now? Who could gainsay it? Moreover—now, surely this was an inspiration—why shouldn't she kill two birds with one stone, and work in her inquiry about the other young lady with this plain thought that was on her tongue to speak?

The sun was a sheer blaze of golden light as they stepped out of the little church into its farewell efforts on behalf of the hill-shadowed land of premature sunsets, and the merpussy looked her best in its effulgence. Sally's good looks had never been such as to convince her she was a beauty; and we suppose she wasn't, critically speaking. But youth and health, and an arrow straight bearing, and a flawless complexion, in a flood of evening light, make a bold bid for beauty even in the eyes of others than young men already half-imbecile with love. Sally's was, at any rate, enough to dumbfounder the little janitress with the key, who stood at gaze with violet eyes in her sunbrowned face in the shadow, looking as though for certain they would never close again; while, as for Dr. Conrad, he was too far gone to want a finishing touch, and if he had been, the faintest animation of an extra flush due to embarrassment at what she was meaning to say would have done the business for him. What could he do but wonder and idolize, even while he almost flinched before his idol; and wait to know what it was she wished he wouldn't. What was there in earth or heaven he would not, if Sally wished it?

"Dr. Conrad, I'm sure you must know what I mean. I do so hate being called 'Miss Sally.' Do make it 'Sally,' and have done with it."

The breezy freshness of her spontaneous ease was infectious, and the shy man's answering laugh showed how it had caught his soul. "Is that all?" says he. "That's soon done—Sally! You know, I *do* call you Sally when I speak to your mother and . . ."

"Now, *do* say father. You've no idea how I like it when people call Jeremiah my father, instead of step."

"Well—father, then. I mean, *they* said call you Sally; so of course I do. But speaking to you—don't you see? . . ."

The doctor hesitates—doesn't actually blush, perhaps. A slight pause in the conversation eases off the context. The little maiden has to lock up the church-door with the big key, and to receive

sixpence and a kiss from Sally. The violet eyes follow the lady and gentleman, fixed in wonderment, as they move off towards the hill, and the last glint of the sun vanishes. Then Sally goes on where they left off :

“No, I don’t see. Speaking to me, what ? Be an explicit little general practitioner, or we shall quarrel, after all, and go home different ways.”

“Well, look here ! You know Bailey, the young man that drives me round in London ?”

“Yes. How does he come in ?”

“Why, just this way : I’ve known the youth for years, and the other day if it doesn’t turn out that he’s been married ever so long ! And when I taxed him with needless secrecy and mistrust of an old friend, what does the young humbug say ? ‘The fact is, sir, I hadn’t the cheek to tell you.’ Well, *I* was like that. I hadn’t the cheek.”

“At any rate, you have the grace to call him a young humbug. I’m glad you’re repentant, Dr. Conrad.”

“Come—I say, now—Sally ! That’s not fair.”

“What’s not fair ?”

“Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. You called me ‘Dr. Conrad.’ ”

“We-ell, I don’t see anything in *that*. Of course, it’s quite a different thing—you and me.”

“Very well, then. I shall say Miss Sally. Miss Sally !”

Here was Sally’s opportunity, clear enough. She had never had a chance till now of bringing back the mysterious young lady of the jetty-interview into court, and examining her. She felt quite sure of herself and her powers of conducting the case—and she was mistaken. She knew nothing of the traps and pitfalls that were gaping for her. Her opening statement went easily though ; it was all prepared.

“Don’t you see, Dr. Conrad dear, the cases are quite different ? When you’re married, your wife will call *me* Sally, of course. But . . . well, if I had a husband, you know, *he* would call *you* Dr. Vereker. Sure to !” Sally felt satisfied with the sound of her voice. But the doctor said never a word, and his face was grave. She would have to go on, unassisted, and she had invented nothing to say, so far. So a wavering crept in—nothing in itself at first, apart from her consciousness of it. “Besides, though, of course *she* would call *me* Sally, she mightn’t quite—not altogether, you know—I mean, she might think

it. . . .” But ambushes revealed themselves in every hedge, ready to break out if she ended this sentence. Dr. Conrad made completion unnecessary.

“Whom do you mean by *she*, Sally?”

“Why, of course! Who could I mean but the girl you told me about that you think wouldn’t agree with your mother?”

“I thought so. See what a mess I made of it! No, Sally, there’s no such person. Now I shall have to speak the truth, and then I shall have to go away from you, and it will all be spoiled. . . .” But Sally interposes on the tense speech, and sound of growing determination in the doctor’s voice:

“Oh no, don’t—no, don’t! Don’t say anything that will change it from *now*. See how happy we are! How could it be better? I’ll call you Conrad, or anything you like. Only, *don’t* make it different.”

“Very well, I won’t. I promise!” The doctor calms down.

“But, Sally dearest—I may say Sally dearest, mayn’t I? . . .”

“Well, perhaps. Only you must make that do for the present.”

But there is a haunting sense of the Octopus in the conscientious soul of her son, and even though he is allowed to say “Sally dearest,” the burden is on him of knowing that he has been swept away in the turmoil of this whirlwind of self, and he is feeling round to say *peccavi*, and make amends by confession. He makes “Sally dearest” do for the moment, but captures as a set-off the hand that slips readily enough into the arm he offers for it, with a caressing other hand, before he speaks again. He renews his promise—but with such a compensation in the hand that remains at rest in his!—and then continues:

“Dearest Sally, I dare say you see how it was—about mother. It was very stupid of me, and I did it very badly. I got puzzled, and lost my head.”

“I thought it was a real young lady, anyhow.”

“I saw you did. And I do think—just now—I should have let you continue believing in the real young lady . . . only when you said that . . .”

“Said what?”

“Said that about your husband, and calling me Conrad. I couldn’t stand it. It was just like a knife . . . no, I’m in earnest, it *was*. How could I have borne it—gone on at all—with you married to anyone else?” He asks this in a tone of serious conviction, of one who is diagnosing a strange case, con-



scientiously. Sally declines consultation—won't be too serious over it.

"You would have had to. Men get on capitally when they have to. But very likely I won't marry you. Don't be too sure! I haven't committed myself, you know." Nevertheless, the hand remains passive in the doctor's, as he continues his diagnosis:

"I shouldn't deserve you. But, then, who could?"

Sally tacitly refuses to help in answering this question.

"I vote for neither of us marrying anybody else, but going on like now," says she thoughtfully.

Sally, you see, was recovering herself after a momentary alarm, produced by the gust of resolution on Dr. Conrad's part. She had shut her window on the storm in his soul, and felt safe in resuming her identity. All through this walk, ever since the hand-incident, she had been hard at work ignoring suggestions of her inner mind that her companion was a loaded gun, and not quite safe to play with. Now she felt she had established a sort of *modus vivendi* which would not involve her in the horrors of a formal engagement, with the concomitants of dissension and bitterness that she had noticed in friends' families on such occasions. Why shouldn't she and poor Prosy walk about together as much as they liked—yes, even call in at a church and get married if they liked—and have no one else fussing over them? The sort of semi-trothplight she had just hushed into silence would do for a good long time to come, because she understood Prosy down to the ground, and, of course, she knew that his mistrusting her was out of the question.

As for the doctor, his was the sort of temperament one often meets with in very fair men of his type—intensely shy, but with a backing of resolution on occasion shown, bred of a capacity for high-strung passion. He had formed his intention fully and clearly of telling Sally the whole truth before they arrived at St. Sennans that evening, and had been hastened to what was virtually an avowal by a premature accident, as we have seen. Now the murder was out, and he was walking home slowly beside the marvel, the mystery, that had taken possession of the inmost recesses of his life—very much in her pocket, if the truth must be told—with an almost intolerable searching fire of joy finding every moment a new untouched recess in his innermost heart. He could have fallen at her feet and kissed them, could have poured out his very soul in passionate protestations, could and would

have done anything that would have given a moment's respite to the tension of his love for this all-absorbing other creature that was absolutely here—a reality, and no dream—beside him. But he was going to be good, at her bidding, and remain a sane and reasonable general practitioner, however much his heart beat and his head swam. Poor Prosy !

No ! On consideration, Agur, the son of Jakeh, didn't know all about it. He only knew the Oriental temperament. He was quite up to date, no doubt, but neither he nor Ithiel nor Ucal nor King Solomon could reckon with spiritual volcanoes. Probably nothing in the world could have explained to either of them the meaning of one or two bits of music Schubert wrote on this subject of Love—we don't flinch from our phraseology; we know that all will understand it whom we care should do so. By the bye, Dr. Vereker was partly German, and a musician. Agur can have had no experience of either. The ancestors of Schubert and Beethoven were splendid savages in his day, sleeping on the snow-wreaths in the forests of the north ; and somewhere among them there was the germ of a love-passion that was one day to ring changes on the peals that were known to Agur, the son of Jakeh.

But this is wandering from the point, and all the while Sally and her lover have been climbing that hill again, and are now walking over the lonely down above, towards the sun, and their shadows are long behind them—at least, their shadow ; for they have but one, and we fancy we have let some of our record slip, for the man's arm is round the girl's waist. Yes, some further clearer understanding has come into their lives, and maybe Sally sees by now that the vote she passed *nem. con.* may be rescinded in the end.

If you had been near them then, invisible, we know you would not have gone close and listened. You would have been too honourable. But you would only have heard this—take our word for it !

“ Do you know what I always call you behind your back ? I always call you Prosy. I don't know why.”

“ Because I *am* prosy—level-headed, slow sort of card—but prosy beyond a doubt.”

“ No, you're not. I don't think you know the least what you're like. But I shall call you Prosy, all the same, or whatever I choose !”

“ You don't take to Conrad, somehow ?”

"It sounds so reproachful. It's like William."

"Does William sound reproachful?"

"Of course it does! Willy-yum! A most reproachful name. No, Prosy dear, I shall call you Prosy, whatever the consequences may be. People must put their own construction upon it."

"Mother calls me Conny very often."

"When she's not taking exception to you...oh no! I know. I was only joking...there, then! we won't quarrel and go home opposite ways about that. Besides, I'm the young lady...."

"Oh, Sally darling, dearest, it does make me feel such a fool. Please don't!"

"Stuff and nonsense, Prosy dear! I shall, if I choose. So there!... No, but seriously—*why* did you think I shouldn't get on well with your mother?" Poor Prosy looks very much embarrassed at this point; his countenance pleads for respite. But Sally won't let him off. And he is as wax in her hands, and she knows it, and also that every word that passes her coral lips seems to the poor stricken man a pearl of wisdom. And she is girl enough to enjoy her power, is Sally.

"*Why* do you think I shan't get on with her?" Note the slight variation in the question, driving the nail home, leaving no escape. The doctor's manner in reply is that of one who appeals to Truth herself to help him, before a court that acknowledges no other jurisdiction.

"Because...I must say it because it's true, only it seems so...so disloyal, you might say, to mother...."

"Well! Because what?"

"Because then it won't be the same as *your* mother. It can't be."

"Why not?"

"Oh, Sally—dearest love—how can it?"

"Well! Perhaps *why not* was fibs. And, of course, mother's an angel, so it's not fair. But, Prosy dear, I'll tell you one thing I *do* think—that affectionate sons make very bad medical attendants for their ma's; and I should say the same if they had all the degrees in Christendom."

"You think a nervous element comes in?..."

And so the conversation ripples on, a quiet undertone of perfect confidence, freedom without reserve as to another self, suddenly discovered in the working identity of a fellow-creature.



It ripples on just thus, all the distance of the walk along the topmost down, in the evening sunlight, and then comes a pause to negotiate the descent to their handy little forest below. Then a sense that they are coming back into a sane, dry world, and must be a lady and a gentleman again. But there must be a little farewell to the enchanted land they are leaving behind—a recognition of its story, under the beech-trees as the last gleam goes, and leaves us our inheritance of twilight.

“Do you remember, darling, how we climbed up there, coming, and had hold to the top?” His lips find hers, naturally and without disguise. It is the close of the movement, and company-manners will be wanted directly. But just a bar or two, and a space, before the music dies! . . .

“I remember,” says Sally. “That began it. Oh, what a long time ago that does seem now! What a rum start it all is—the whole turn-out!” For the merpussy is her incorrigible self, and will be to the last.

When Sally reached home, very late, she was not displeased, though she was a little surprised, to find that Mrs. Lobjoit was keeping dinner back, and that her mother and Fenwick had not reappeared, having been away since they parted. Not displeased, because it gave her time to settle down—the expression she made use of, to think with; not with any admission, however, that she either felt or looked unusually *exaltée*—but surprised, because it was eight o’clock, and she felt that even Mrs. Lobjoit’s good-nature might have limits.

But while she was settling down, in a happy, excited dream she half wondered that she did not wake from, back came the truants; and she heard from her room above Mrs. Lobjoit’s report that Miss Sally was gone upstairs to get ready, with the faintest hint of reproach in the tone. Then her mother’s “Don’t stop to read letters, Gerry—that’ll do after,” and Fenwick’s “All right!” not followed by immediate obedience. Then, after half a moment’s delay, in which she felt some surprise at herself for not going out to meet them coming up the stairs, her mother’s voice approaching, that asked where the kitten was.

“Oh, here you are, chick!—how long have you been in? Why, Sallykin! what is it, child? . . . Oh, Gerry—Gerry—come up here and hear this!” For the merpussy, in spite of many stoical resolutions, had merged a beginning of verbal communication in a burst of happy tears on her mother’s bosom.

And when Fenwick, coming upstairs three steps at a time, filled the whole house with "Hullo, Sarah! what's the latest intelligence?" this young lady had only just time to pull herself together into something like dignified self-possession, in order to reply ridiculously—how could she have been our usual Sally, else?—"We-ell! I don't see that it's anything so very remarkable, after all. I've been encouraging my medical adviser's attentions, if you want to know, Jeremiah."

Was it only a fancy of Sally's, as she ended off a hurried toilet, for Mrs. Lobjoit's sake, or did her mother say to Fenwick, "Well!—*that* is something delightful, at any rate"? As though it were in some sense a set-off against something not delightful elsewhere.

## CHAPTER XLII

WHEN Fenwick turned back towards home, ostensibly to shorten Rosalind's visit to the doctor's mother, he had no intention of doing so early enough to allow of his rejoining his companions, however slowly they might walk. Neither did he mean to deprive old Mrs. Vereker of Rosalind until she had had her full allowance of her. In an hour would do—or three-quarters. He discounted twenty-five per cent., owing to a recollection of the green veil and spectacles. Then he felt unkind, and said to himself, that, after all, the old woman couldn't help it.

Fenwick felt he was making a great concession in giving up three-quarters of an hour of Rosalind. As soon as he had had exercise enough for the day, and was in a mood to smoke and saunter about idly, he wanted Rosalind badly, and was little disposed to give her up. But the old Goody was going away to-morrow, and he would be liberal. He would take a turn along the sea-front—would have time to get down to the jetty—and then would invade the cave of the Octopus and extract the prisoner from its tentacles.

His intention in forsaking Sally and the doctor was half suspected by the latter, quite clear to himself, and only unperceived by his opaque stepdaughter. As he idled down towards the old fisher-dwellings and the net-huts, he tried to picture the form the declaration would take, and the way it would be received. That this would be favourable he never doubted for a moment; but he recalled the speech of Benedict to Beatrice, "By my troth I take thee for pity," and fancied Sally's response might be of the same complexion. His recollection of these words produced a mental recurrence, a distressing and imperfect one, connected with the earlier time he could not reach back to, of the words being used to himself by a girl who ascribed them to Rosalind in *As You Like it*, and a discussion after of their whereabouts in Shakespeare.



The indescribable wrench this gave his mind was so painful that he was quite relieved to recall Vereker's opinion that it was always the imperfection of the memory and the effort that gave pain, not the thing remembered. And in this case there could be no doubt that it was a mere dream, for the girl not only took the form of his Rosey he was going back to directly, but actually claimed her name, saying distinctly, "like my namesake, Celia's friend, in Shakespeare." Could any clearer proof be given that it was mere brain-froth?

The man with "Bessie" and "Elinor" tattooed on his arm was enjoying a pipe and mending a net, not to be too idle. The glass might be rising—or not. He was independent of Science. A trifle of wind in the night was his verdict, glass or no! The season was drawing nigh to a close now for a bathing-resort, as you might say. Come another se'nnight, you wouldn't see a machine down, as like as not. But you could never say, to a nicety. He'd known every lodging in the old town full, times and again, to the end of September month, before now. But this year was going to fall early, and your young lady would lose her swimming.

"She's a rare lass, too, for the water," he concluded, without any consciousness of familiarity in the change of phrase. "Not that I know much myself, touching swimming and the like. For I can't swim myself, never a stroke."

"That's strange, too, for a seaman," said Fenwick.

"No, sir! Not so strange as you might think it. You ask up and down among we, waterside or seafaring, and you'll find a many have never studied it, for the purpose. Many that would make swimmers, with a bit of practice, will hold off, for the reason I tell you. Overboard in mid-ocean, and none to help, and not a spar, would you soonest drown, end on, or have to fight for it, like it or no?"

"Drown! The sooner the better." Fenwick has no doubt about the matter.

"Why, sure! So I say, master. And I've put no encouragement on young Benjamin, over yonder, to give study to the learning of it, for the same reason. And not a stroke can he swim, any more than his father."

"Well! I can't swim myself, so there's three of us!" said Fenwick. "My daughter swims enough for the lot." It gave him such pleasure to speak thus of Sally boldly, where there need be no exact definition of their kinship. The net-mender

pursued the subject with the kind of gravity on him that always comes on a seaman when drowning is under discussion.

"She's a rare one, for sure. Never but three, or may be fower, have I seen in my time to come anight to her—man nor woman. The best swimmer a long way I've known—Peter Burtenshaw by name—I helped bring to after drowning. He'd swum—at a guess—the best part of six hours afore we heard the cry of him on our boat. Too late a bit we were, but we found him, just stone-dead like, and brought him round. It was what Peter said of that six hours put me off of letting 'em larn yoong Benjamin to swim when he was a yoongster. And when he got to years of understanding I told him my mind, and he never put himself to study it."

Fenwick would have liked to go on talking with the fisherman, as his mental recurrence about Shakespeare had fidgeted him, and he found speech a relief. But some noisy visitors from the new St. Sennans on the cliff above had made an irruption into the little old fishing-quarter, and the attention of the net-mender was distracted by possibilities of a boat-to-day being foisted on their simplicity; it was hardly rough enough to forbid the idea. Fenwick, therefore, sauntered on towards the jetty, but presently turned to go back, as half his time had elapsed.

As he repassed the net-mender with a short word or two for valediction, his ear was caught by a loud voice among the party of visitors, who were partly sitting on the beach, partly throwing stones in the water. Something familiar about that voice, surely!

"I gannod throw stoanss. I am too vat. I shall sit on the beach and see effrypotty else throw stoanss. I shall smoke another cigar. Will you haff another cigar, Mr. Prown? You will not? Ferry well! Nor you, Mrs. Prown? Not for the worlt? Ferry well! Nor you, Mr. Bilkington? Ferry well! I shall haff one myself, and you shall throw stoanss." And then, as though to remove the slightest doubt about the identity of the speaker, the voice broke into song:

"Ich hatt' einen Kameraden,  
Einen bessern findst du nicht,"

but ended on "Mein guter Kamerad," exclaiming stentorically, "Opleitch me with a madge," and lighting his cigar in spite of his companions' indignation at the music stopping.

Fenwick stood hesitating a moment in doubt what to do. His



inclination was to go straight down the beach to his old friend, whom—of course, you understand?—he now remembered quite well, and explain the strange circumstances that had rendered their meeting in Switzerland abortive. But then!—what would the effect be on his present life, in its relation to Rosalind and (almost as important) to Sally? Diedrich Kreutzkammer had been, for some time in California, a most intimate friend. Fenwick had made him the confidant of his marriage and his early life, all that he had since forgotten, and he had it now in his power to recover all this from the past. Strange to say, although he could remember the telling of these things, he could only remember weak, confused snatches of what he told. It was unaccountable—but there!—he could not try to unravel that skein now. He must settle, and promptly, whether to speak to the Baron or to run.

He was not long in coming to a decision, especially as he saw that hesitation was sure to end in the adoption of the former course—probably the wrong one. He just caught the Baron's last words—a denunciation of the hotel he was stopping at, loud enough to reach the new St. Sennans, of which it was the principal constituent—and then walked briskly off. He arrived at Iggulden's within the hour he had first conceded to the Octopus, and got Rosalind out for a walk, as originally proposed.

There was no apparent reason why the impossibility of overtaking Sally and the doctor should be interpreted into an excuse for going in the opposite direction; but each accepted it as such, or as a justification at least. Rosalind had not so distinct a reason as her husband for wishing not to break in upon them, as he had not reported the whole of his last talk with Vereker. But though she did not know that Dr. Conrad had as good as promised to make a clean breast of it before returning to London, she thought nothing was more likely than that he should do so, and resolved to leave the stage clear for the leading parts. She may even have flattered herself that she was showing tact—keeping an unconscious Gerry out of the way, who might else interfere with the stars in their courses, in the manner of the tactless. Rosalind suspected this of Sally, that whatever she might think she thought, and whatever parade she made of an even mind no sentiments whatever prevailed in, there was in her inmost heart another Sally, locked in and unconfessed, that had strong views on the subject. And she wanted this Sally to



be let out for a spell, or for poor Prosy to be allowed into her cell long enough to speak for himself. Anyhow, this was their last chance here, and she wasn't going to spoil it.

She had gone near to making up her mind—after her sufferings from Gwenny's mamma in the morning—to attempt, at any rate, a communication of their joint story to her husband. But it *must* depend on circumstances and possibilities. She foresaw a long period of resolutions undermined by doubts, decisions rescinded at the last moment, and suddenly-revealed ambushes, and perhaps in the end self-reproach for a mismanaged revelation that might have been so much more skilfully done. Never mind—it was all in the day's work! She had borne much, and would bear more.

“How do you know they are all nonsense, Gerry darling?” We catch their conversation in the middle as they walk along the sands the tide is leaving clear, after accommodating the few morning-bathers with every opportunity to get out of their depths. “How do you *know*? Surely the parts that you *do* seem to remember clearly *must* be all right, however confused the rest is.”

Fenwick gives his head the old shake, dashes his hair across his brow and rubs it, then replies: “The worst of the job is, you see, that the bits I remember clearest are the greatest gammon. What do you make of that?”

Rosalind's hand closes on her nettle. “Instance, Gerry!—give me an instance, and I shall know what you mean.”

Fenwick is outrageously confident of the safety of his last imperfect recollection. He can trust to its absurdity if he can trust to anything.

“Well! For instance, just now—an hour ago—I recollected something about a girl who would have it Rosalind in *As You Like It* said, ‘By my troth I take thee for pity,’ to Orlando. And all the while it was Benedict said it to Beatrice in *All's Well that Ends Well*.”

The hand on the nettle tightens. “Gerry *dearest*!” she remonstrates. “There's nothing in *that*, as Sallykin says. Of course it *was* Benedict said it to Beatrice.”

“Yes—but the gammon wasn't in that. It was the girl that said it. When I tried to think who it was, she turned into *you*! I mean, she became exactly like you.”

“But I'm a woman of forty.” This was a superb piece of nettle-grasping; and there was not a tremor in the voice that

said it, and the handsome face of the speaker was calm, if a little pale. Fenwick noticed nothing.

“Like what I should suppose you were as a girl of eighteen or twenty. It’s perfectly clear how the thing worked. It was from something else I seem to recollect her saying, ‘Like my namesake, Celia’s friend in Shakespeare.’ The moment she said that, of course the name Rosalind made me think you into the business. It was quite natural.”

“Quite natural! And when I was that girl that was what I said.” She had braced herself up in all the resolution of her strong nature, to the telling of her secret, and his; and she thought this was her opportunity. She was mistaken. For as she stood, keeping, as it were, a heartquake in abeyance, till she should see him begin to understand, he replied without the least perceiving her meaning—evidently accounting her speech only a variant on “If I *had* been that girl,” and so forth—“Of course you did, sweetheart,” said he, with a laugh in his voice, “*when* you were that girl. And I expect that girl said it when she was herself, whoever she was, and the name Rosalind turned her into you? Look at this cuttlefish before he squirts.”

For a moment Rosalind Fenwick was almost two people, so distinctly did the two aspects or conditions of herself strike her mind. The one was that of breath drawn freely, of a respite, a reprieve, a heartquake escaped; for, indeed, she had begun to feel, as she neared the crisis, that the trial might pass her powers of endurance. The other of a new terror—that the tale, perhaps, *could not be told at all!* that, unassisted by a further revival of her husband’s memory, it would remain permanently incredible by him, with what effect of a half-knowledge of the past God only knew. The sense of reprieve got the better of the new-born apprehension—bid it stand over for a while, at least. Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof.

Meanwhile, Gerry, absolutely unconscious of her emotion, and seeming much less disconcerted over this abortive recollection than over previous ones, stood gazing down into the clear rock-pool that contained the cuttlefish. “Do come and look at him, Rosey love,” said he. “His manners are detestable, but there can be no doubt about the quality of his black.”

She leaned a bit heavily on the arm she took as they left the cuttlefish to his ill-conditioned solitude. “Tired, dearest?” said her husband; and she answered, “Just a little!” But his mind was a clean sheet on which his story would have to be



written in ink as black as the cuttlefish's Parthian squirt, and in a full round hand without abbreviations, unless it should do something to help itself. Let it rest while she rested and thought.

She thought and thought—happy for all her strain of nerve and mind, on the quiet stretch of sand and outcrop of chalk, slippery with weed, that the ebbing tide would leave safe for them for hours to come. So thinking, and seeing the way in which her husband's reason was entrenched against the facts of his own life, in a citadel defended by human experience at bay, she wavered in her resolution of a few hours since—or, rather, she saw the impossibility of forcing the position, thinking contentedly that at least if it was so impracticable to her it would be equally so to other agencies, and he might be relied on to remain in the dark. The *status quo* would be the happiest, if it could be preserved. So when, after a two hours' walk through the evening glow and the moonrise, Rosalind came home to Sally's revelation, as we have seen, the slight exception her voice took to universal rejoicing was the barest echo of the tension of her absolutely unsuccessful attempt to get in the thin end of the wedge of an incredible revelation.

Quite incredible! So hopeless is the case of a mere crude, unadulterated fact against an irresistible *a priori* belief in its incredibility.

Sally was reserved about details, but clear about the outcome of her expedition with Prosy. They perfectly understood each other, and it wasn't anybody else's concern; present company's, of course, excepted. Questioned as to plans for the future—inasmuch as a marriage did not seem inconsequent under the circumstances—Sally became enigmatical. The word "marriage" had not been so much as mentioned. She admitted the existence of the institution, but proposed—now and for the future—to regard it as premature. Wasn't even sure she would tell anybody, except Tishy; and perhaps also Henriette Prince, because she was sure to ask, and possibly Karen Braun if she did ask. But she didn't seem at all clear what she was going to say to them, as she objected to the expression "engaged." A thing called "it" without an antecedent, got materialised, and did duty for something more intelligible. Yes!—she would tell Tishy about It, and just those one or two others. But if It was going to make any difference, or there was to be any fuss, she would just break It off, and have done with It.



Sentiments of this sort provoked telegraphic interchanges of smile-suggestion between her hearers all through the evening meal that was so unusually late. This lateness received sanction from the fact that Mr. Fenwick would very likely have letters by the morning post that would oblige him to return to town by the afternoon train. If so, this was his last evening, and clearly nothing mattered. Law and order might be blowed, or hanged.

It was under these circumstances, rather a surprise to his hearers when he said, after smoking half through his first cigar, that he thought he should walk up to the hotel in the new town, because he fancied there was a man there he knew. As to his name, he thought it was Pilkington, but wasn't sure. Taunted with reticence, he said it was nothing but business. As Rosalind could easily conceive that Gerry might not want to introduce all the Pilkingtons he chanced across to his family, she didn't press for explanation. "He'll very likely call round to see your young man, chick, when he's done with Pilkington." To which Sally replied, "Oh, *he'll* come round here. Told him to!" Which he did, at about ten o'clock. But Fenwick had never called at Iggulden's, neither had he come back to his own home. It was after midnight before his foot was on the stairs, and Sally had retired for the night, telling her mother not to fidget—Jeremiah would be all right.

## CHAPTER XLIII

AT eleven o'clock that night a respectable man with weak eyes and a cold was communing with a commanding Presence that lived in a bureau—nothing less!—in the entrance-hall of the big hotel at the new St. Sennans. It was that of a matron with jet earrings and tube-curls and a tortoise-shell comb, and an educated contempt for her species. It lived in that bureau with a speaking-pipe to speak to every floor, and a telephone for the universe beyond. He that now ventured to address it was a waiter, clearly, for he carried a table-napkin, on nobody's behalf and uselessly, but with a feeling for emblems which might have made him Rouge Dragon in another sphere. As it was, he was the head waiter in the accursed restaurant or dining-salon at the excruciating new hotel, where he would bring you cold misery from the counter at the other end, or lukewarm depression *à la carte* from the beyond—but nothing that would do you any good inside, from anywhere.

"Are those parties going, in eighty-nine, do you make out?" The Presence speaks, but with languid interest.

"Hapathetic party, and short customer. Takes you up rather free. Name of Pilkington. Not heard 'em say anything!"

"Who did you say was going?"

"The German party. Party of full 'abit. Call at seven in the morning. Fried sole and cutlets *à la* mangtynong and sweet omelette at seven-thirty sharp. Too much by way of smoking all day, in my thinking! But they say plums and greengages, took all through meals, is a set-off."

"I don't pretend to be an authority. Isn't that him, in the smoking-room?"

"Goin' on in German? Prob'ly." Both stop and listen. What they hear is the Baron, going on very earnestly indeed in German. What keeps them listening is that another voice

comes in occasionally—a voice with more than mere earnestness in it ; a voice rather of anguish under control. Then both voices pause, and silence comes suddenly.

“ Who’s the other party ? ”

“ In a blue soote, livin’ in one of the sea ’ouses down on the beach. Big customer. Prodooces a rousin’ impression.”

“ Is that his daughter that swims ? . . . That’s him—coming away.”

But it isn’t. It is the Baron, wrathful, shouting, swearing, neither in German nor English, but in either or both. Where is that tanned kellner ? Why does he not answer the pell ? This is an *abscheuliches* hotel, and every one connected with it is an *Esel*. What he wants is some cognac and a doctor forthwith. His friend has fainted, and he has been pressing the tanned puddon, and nobody comes.

The attitude of the lady with the earrings epitomizes the complete indifference of a hotel-keeper to the private lives of its guests nowadays. That bell must be seen to, she says. Otherwise she is callous. The respectable waiter hurries for the cognac, and returns with a newly-drawn bottle and two glasses to the smoking-room, to find that the gentleman has recovered, and won’t have any. He suggests that our young man could step round for Dr. Maccoll ; but the proposed patient says, “ The devil fly away with Dr. Maccoll ! ” which doesn’t look like docility. The respectable waiter takes note of his appearance, and reports of it to his principal on dramatic grounds, not as a matter into which human sympathies enter.

“ Very queer he looks. Doo to reaction, or the coatin’s of the stomach. Affectin’ the action of the heart. . . . No, there’s nobody else in the smoking-room. Party with the ’ook instead of a hand’s watching of ’em play penny-pool in the billiard-room.” Surely a tale to bring a tear to the eye of sensibility ! But not to one that sees in mankind only a thing that comes and goes and pays its bill—or doesn’t. The lady in the bureau appears to listen slightly to the voices that come afresh from the smoking-room, but their duration is all she is concerned with. “ He’s going now,” she says. He is ; and he does look queer—very queer. His companion does not leave him at the door, but walks out into the air with him without his hat, speaking to him volubly and earnestly, always in German. His speech suggests affectionate exhortation, and the way he takes his arm is affectionate. The voices go out of hearing, and it is so long before



the Baron returns, hatless, that he must have gone all the way to the sea-houses down on the beach.

Sally retired to her own couch in order to supply an inducement to her mother to go to bed herself, and sit up no longer for Gerry's return, which might be any time, of course. Rosalind conceded the point, and was left alone under a solemn promise not to be a goose and fidget. But she was very deliberate about it; and though she didn't fidget, she went all the slower that she might think back on a day—an hour—of twenty years ago, and on the incident that Gerry had half recalled, quite accurately as far as it went, but strangely unsupported by surroundings or concomitants.

It came back to her with both. She could remember even the face of her mother's coachman Forsyth, who had driven her with Miss Stanynaught, her *chaperon* in this case, to the dance where she was to meet Gerry, as it turned out; and how Forsyth was told not to come for them before three in the morning, as he would only have to wait; and how Miss Stanynaught, her governess of late, who was over forty, pleaded for two, and Forsyth *did* have to wait; and how she heard the music and the dancing above, for they were late; and how they waded upstairs against a descending stream of muslin skirts and marked attentions going lawnwards towards the summer night, and bent on lemonade and ices; and then their entry into the dancing-room, and an excited hostess and daughters introducing partners like mad; and an excited daughter greeting a gentleman who had come upstairs behind them, with "Well, Mr. Palliser, you *are* late. You don't deserve to be allowed to dance at all." And that was Jessie Nairn, of course, who added, "I've jilted you for Arthur Fenwick."

How well Rosalind could remember turning round and seeing a splendid young chap who said, "What a jolly shame!" and didn't seem to be oppressed by that or anything else; also Jessie's further speech, apologising for having also appropriated Miss Graythorpe's partner. So they would have to console each other. What a saucy girl Jessie was, to be sure! She introduced them with a run, "Mr. Algernon Palliser, Miss Rosalind Graythorpe, Miss Rosalind Graythorpe, Mr. Algernon Palliser," and fled. And Rosalind was piqued about Arthur Fenwick's desertion. It seemed all so strange now—such a vanished world! Just fancy!—she had been speculating if

she should accept Arthur, if he got to the point of offering himself.

But a shaft from Cupid's bow must have been shot from a slack string, for Rosalind could remember how quickly she forgot Arthur Fenwick as she took a good look at Gerry Palliser, his great friend, whom he had so often raved about to her, and who was to be brought to play lawn-tennis next Monday. And then to the ear of her mind, listening back to long ago, came a voice so like the one she was to hear soon, when that footstep should come on the stair.

"I can't waltz like Arthur, Miss Graythorpe. But you'll have to put up with me." And the smile that spread over his whole face was so like him now. Then came the allusion to *As You Like it*.

"I'll take you for pity, Mr. Palliser—'by my troth,' as my namesake Rosalind, Celia's friend, in Shakespeare, says to what's his name . . . Orlando. . . ."

"Come, I say, Miss Graythorpe, that's not fair. It was Benedict said it to Beatrice."

"Did he? And did Beatrice say she wouldn't waltz with him?"

"Oh, please! I'm so sorry. No—it wasn't Benedict—it *was* Rosalind."

"That's right! Now let me button your glove for you. You'll be for ever, with those big fingers." For both of us, thought Rosalind, were determined to begin at once and not lose a minute. That dear old time . . . before . . . !

Then, even clearer still, came back to her the dim summer-dawn in the garden, with here and there a Chinese lantern not burned out, and the flagging music of the weary musicians afar, and she and Gerry with the garden nearly to themselves. She could feel the cool air of the morning again, and hear the crowing of a self-important cock. And the informal wager which would live the longer—a Chinese lantern at the point of death, or the vanishing moon just touching the line of tree-tops against the sky, stirred by the morning wind. And the voice of Gerry when return to the house and a farewell became inevitable. She shut her eyes, and could hear it and her own answer.

"I shall go to India in six weeks, and never see you again."

"Yes, you will; because Arthur Fenwick is to bring you round to lawn-tennis. . . ."

"That won't make having to go any better. And then

when I come back, in ever so many years, I shall find you . . .”

“Gone to kingdom come?”

“No—married! . . . Oh no, do stop out—don’t go in yet. . . .”

“We ought to go in. Now, don’t be silly.”

“I can’t help it. . . . Well!—a fellow I know asked a girl to marry him he’d only known two hours.”

“What very silly friends you must have, Mr. Palliser! Did she marry him?”

“No! but they’re engaged, and he’s in Ceylon. But you wouldn’t marry me. . . .”

“How on earth can you tell, in such a short time? What a goose you are! . . . There!—the music’s stopped, and Mrs. Nairn said that must be the last waltz. Come along, or we shall catch it.”

They had known each other exactly four hours!

Rosalind remembered it all, word for word. And how Gerry captured a torn glove to keep; and when he came, as appointed, to lawn-tennis, went back at once to Shakespeare, and said he had looked it up, and it *was* Beatrice and Benedict, and not Rosalind at all. She could remember, too, her weary and reproachful *chaperon*, and the well-deserved scolding she got for the way she had been going on with that young Palliser. Eight dances!

So long ago! And she could think through it all again. And to him it had become a memory of shreds and patches. Let it remain so, or become again oblivion—vanish with the rest of his forgotten past! Her thought that it would do so was confidence itself as she sat there waiting for his footstep on the stair. For had she not spoken of herself unflinchingly as the girl who said those words from Shakespeare, and had not her asseveration slipped from the mind that could not receive it as water slips from oil? She could wait there without misgiving—could even hope that, whatever it was due to, this recent stirring of the dead bones of memory might mean nothing, and die away leaving all as it was before.

Sally, acknowledging physical fatigue with reluctance, after her long walk and swim in the morning, went to bed. It presented itself to her as a thing practicable, and salutary in her state of bewilderment, to lie in bed with her eyes closed, and think over the events of the day. It would be really quiet.



And then she would be awake when Jeremiah came in, and would call out for information if there was a sound of anything to hear about. But her project fell through, for she had scarcely closed her eyes when she fell into a trap laid for her by sleep—deep sleep, such as we fancy dreamless. And when Fenwick came back she could not have heard his words to her mother, even had they risen above the choking undertone in which he spoke, nor her mother's reply, more audible in its sudden alarm, but still kept down—for, startled as she was at Gerry's unexpected words, she did not lose her presence of mind.

"What is it, Gerry darling? What is it, dear love? Has anything happened? I'll come."

"Yes—come into my room. Come away from our girl. She mustn't hear."

She knew then at once that his past had come upon him somehow. She knew it at once from the tone of his voice, but she could make no guess as to the manner of it. She knew, too, that that heartquake was upon her—the one she had felt so glad to stave off that day upon the beach—and that self-command had to be found in an emergency she might not have the strength to meet.

For the shock, coming as it did upon her false confidence—a sudden thunderbolt from a cloudless sky—was an overwhelming one. She knew she would have a moment's outward calm before her powers gave way, and she must use it for Sally's security. What Gerry said was true—their girl *must not* hear.

But oh, how quick thought travels! By the time Rosalind, after stopping a second outside Sally's door, listening for any movement, had closed that of her husband's room as she followed him in, placing the light she carried on a chair as she entered, she had found in the words "our girl" a foretaste of water in the desert that might be before her.

Another moment and she knew she was safe, so far as Gerry himself went. As he had himself said, he would be the same Gerry to her and she the same Rosey to him, whatever wild beast should leap out of the past to molest them. She knew it was as he caught her to his heart, crushing her almost painfully in the great strength that went beyond his own control as he shook and trembled like an aspen-leaf under the force of an emotion she could only, as yet, guess at the nature of. But the guess was not a wrong one, in so far as it said that each was there

to be the other's shield and guard against ill, past, present, and to come—a refuge-haven to fly to from every tempest fate might have in store. She could not speak—could not have found utterance even had words come to her. She could only rest passive in his arms, inert and dumb, feeling in the short gasps that caught his breath how he struggled for speech and failed, then strove again. At last his voice came—short, spasmodic sentences breaking or broken by like spans of silence :

“ Oh, my darling, my darling, remember ! . . . remember ! . . . whatever it is . . . it shall not come between us . . . it shall not . . . it *shall* not . . . Oh, my dear ! . . . give me time, and I shall speak . . . if I could only say at once . . . in one word . . . could only understand . . . that is all . . . to understand. . . .” He relaxed his hold upon her ; but she held to him, or she might have fallen, so weak was she, and so unsteady was the room and all in it to her sight. The image of him that she saw seemed dim and in a cloud, as he pressed his hands upon his eyes and stood for a moment speechless ; then struggled again to find words that for another moment would not come, caught in the gasping of his breath. Then he got a longer breath, as for ease, and drawing her face towards his own—and this time the touch of his hand was tender as a child's—he kissed it repeatedly—kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. And in his kiss was security for her, safe again in the haven of his love, come what might. She felt how it brought back to her the breath she knew would fail her, unless her heart, that had beaten so furiously a moment since, and then died away, should resume its life. The room became steady, and she saw his face and its pallor plainly, and knew that in a moment she should find her voice. But he spoke first, again.

“ That is what I want, dear love—to understand. Help me to understand,” he said. And then, as though feeling for the first time how she was clinging to him for support, he passed his arm round her gently, guiding her to sit down. But he himself remained standing by her, as though physically unaffected by the storm of emotion, whatever its cause, that had passed over him. Then Rosalind found her voice.

“ Gerry darling—let us try and get quiet over it. After all, we are both here.” As she said this she was not very clear about her own meaning, but the words satisfied her. “ I see you have remembered more, but I cannot tell how much. Now try and tell me—have you remembered *all* ?”

“ I think so, darling.” He was speaking more quietly now,



as one docile to her influence. His manner gave her strength to continue.

"Since you left Mr. Pilkington—your friend at the hotel—didn't you say the name Pilkington?"

"No—there was no Pilkington! Oh yes, there was!—a friend of Diedrich's. . . ."

"Has it come back, I mean, since you left the house? Who is Diedrich?"

"Stop a bit, dearest love! I shall be able to tell it all directly." She, too, was glad of a lull, and welcomed his sitting down beside her on the bed end, drawing her face to his, and keeping it with the hand that was not caressing hers. Presently he spoke again, more at ease, but always in the undertone, just above a whisper, that meant the consciousness of Sally, too, near. Rosalind said, "She won't hear," and he replied, "No; it's all right, I think," and continued:

"Diedrich Kreutzkammer—he's Diedrich—don't you remember? Of course you do! . . . I heard him down on the beach to-day, singing. I wanted to go to him at once, but I had to think of it first, so I came home. Then I settled to go to him at the hotel. I had not remembered anything then—anything to speak of—I had not remembered IT. Now it is all back upon me, in a whirl." He freed the hand that held hers for a moment, and pressed his fingers hard upon his eyes; then took her hand again, as before. "I wanted to see the dear old fellow and talk over old times, at 'Frisco and up at the Gold River—that, of course! But I wanted, too, to make him repeat to me all the story I had told him of my early marriage—oh, my darling!—*our* marriage, and I did not know it! I know it now—I know it now."

Rosalind could feel the thrill that ran through him as his hand tightened on hers. She spoke, to turn his mind for a moment. "How came Baron Kreutzkammer at St. Sennans?"

"Diedrich? He has a married niece living at Canterbury. Don't you remember? He told you and you told me. . . ." Rosalind had forgotten this, but now recalled it. "Well, we talked about the States—all the story I shall have to tell you, darling, some time; but, oh dear, how confused I get! *That* wasn't the first. The first was telling him my story—the accident, and so on—and it was hard work to convince him it was really me at Sonnenberg. That was rather a difficulty, because I had sent him in the name I had in America, and he only saw



an old friend he thought was dead. All *that* was a trifle ; but, oh, the complications ! . . .”

“ What was the name you had in America ?”

Fenwick answered musingly, “ Harrisson,” and then paused before saying, “ No, I had better not . . .” and leaving the sentence unfinished. She caught his meaning, and said no more. After all, it could matter very little if she never heard his American experiences, and the name Harrisson had no association for her. She left him to resume, without suggestion.

“ He might have reminded me of anything that happened in the States, and I should just have come back here and told it you, because, you see, I should have been sure it was true, and no dream. It was India. I had told him all, don’t you see ? And I got him to repeat it, and then it all came back—all at once, the moment I saw it was *you*, my darling—you yourself ! It all became quite easy then. It was *us*—you and me ! I know it now—I know it now !”

“ But, dearest, what made you see that it was us ?”

“ Why, of course, because of the name ! He told me all I had told him from the beginning in German. We always spoke German. He could not remember your first name, but he remembered your mother’s—it had stayed in his mind—because of the German word *nachtigall* being so nearly the same. As he said the word my mind got a frightful twist, and I thought I was mad. I did, indeed, my dearest love—raving mad !”

“ And then you knew it ?”

“ And then I knew it. I nearly fainted clean off, and he went for brandy ; but I came round, and the dear old boy saw me to this door here. It has all only just happened.” He remained silent again for a little space, holding her hand, and then said suddenly : “ It *has* happened, has it not ? Is it all true, or am I dreaming ?”

“ Be patient, darling. It is all true—at least, I think so. It is all true if it is like this, because remember, dear, you have told me almost nothing. . . . I only know that it has come back to you that I am Rosey and that you are Gerry—the old Rosey and Gerry long ago in India. . . .” She broke down over her won words, as her tears, a relief in themselves, came freely, taxing her further to keep her voice under for Sally’s sake. It was only for a moment ; then she seemed to brush them aside in an effort of self-mastery, and again began, dropping her voice

even lower. "It is all true if it is like this. I came out to marry you in India . . . my darling ! . . . and a terrible thing happened to me on the way . . . the story you know more of now than I could tell you then . . . for how *could* I tell it . . . think ? . . ."

Her husband started up from her side gasping, beating his head like a madman. She was in terror lest she had done wrong in her speech. "Gerry, Gerry !" she appealed to him in a scarcely raised voice, "think of Sally !" She rose and went to him, repeating, "Think of Sally !" then drew him back to his former place. His breath went and came heavily, and his forehead was drenched with sweat, as in epilepsy ; but the paroxysm left him as he sank back beside her, saying only, "My God ! that miscreant !" but showing that he had heard her by the force of the constraint he put upon his voice. It gave her courage to go on.

"I could not get it told then. I did not know the phrases—and you were so happy, my darling—so happy when you met me at the station ! Oh, how could I ? But I was wrong. I ought not to have let you marry me, not knowing. And then . . . it seemed deception, and I could not right it. . . ." Her voice broke again, as she hid her face on his shoulder ; but she knew her safety in the kiss she felt on her free hand, and the gentleness of his that stroked her hair. Then she heard his almost whispered words above her head, close to her ear :

"Darling, forgive me—forgive me ! It was *I* that was in fault. I might have known. . . ."

"Gerry dear . . . no ! . . ."

"Yes, I might. There was a woman there—had been an officer's wife. She came to me and spoke rough truths about it—told me her notion of the tale in her own language. 'Put her away from you,' she said, 'and you won't get another like her, and won't deserve her !' And she was right, poor thing ! But I was headstrong and obstinate, and would not hear her. Oh, my darling, *how* we have paid for it !"

"But you have found me again, dear love !" He did not answer, but raised up her face from his shoulder, parting the loose hair tenderly—for it was all free on her shoulders—and gazing straight into her eyes with an expression of utter bewilderment. "Yes, darling, what is it ?" said she, as though he had spoken.

"I am getting fogged!" he said, "and cannot make it out. Was it pure accident? Surely something must have happened to bring it about."

"Bring what about?"

"How came we to find each other again, I mean?"

"Oh, I see! Pure accident, I should say, dear! Why not? It would not have happened if it had not been possible. Thank God it did!"

"Thank God it did! But think of the strangeness of it all! How came Sally in that train?"

"Why not, darling? Where else could she have been? She was coming back to tea, as usual."

"And she put me in a cab—bless her!—she and Conrad Vereker—and brought me home to you. But did you know me at once, darling?"

"At once."

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"If you had shown the slightest sign of knowing me I should have told you, and taken my chance; but you only looked at me and smiled, and never knew me! Was mine a good plan? At least, it has answered." A clasp and a kiss was the reply. She was glad that he should choose the line of conversation, and did not break into the pause that followed. The look of fixed bewilderment on his face was painful, but she did not dare any suggestion of guidance to his mind. She had succeeded but ill before in going back to the cause of their own early severance. Yet that was what she naturally had most at heart, and longed to speak of. Could she have chosen, she would have liked to resume it once for all, in spite of the pain—to look the dreadful past in the face, and then agree to forget it together. She was hungry to tell him that even when he broke away from her that last time she saw him at Umballa—broke away from her so roughly that his action had all the force and meaning of a blow—she only saw *his* image of the wrong she had done, or seemed to have done him; that she had nothing for him through it all but love and forgiveness. At least, she would have tried to make sure that he had been able to connect and compare the tale she had told him since their reunion with his new memory of the facts of twenty years ago. But she dared say nothing further as yet. For his part, at this moment, he seemed strangely willing to let all the old story lapse, and to dwell only on the incredible chance that had brought them again together. All



that eventful day our story began with had leaped into the foreground of his mind.

Presently he said, still almost whispering hoarsely, with a constant note of amazement and something like panic in his voice : " If it hadn't happened—the accident—I suppose I should have gone back to the hotel. And what should I have done next ? I should never have found you and Sally. . . . "

" Were you poor, Gerry darling ? "

" Frightfully rich ! Gold-fields, mining-place up the Yu-kon. Near the Arctic Circle. " He went on in a rapid undertone, as if he were trying to supply briefly what he knew the woman beside him must be yearning to know, if not quite unlike other women. " I wasn't well off before—didn't get on at the Bar at St. Louis—but not poor exactly. Then I made a small pile cattle-ranching in Texas, and somehow went to live at Quebec. There were a lot of French Canadians I took to. Then after that, 'Frisco and the gold. . . . "

" Gerry dear ! "

" Yes, love, what ? "

" Have you any relations living in England ? "

" Heaps, but I haven't spoken to one of them for years and years—not since *then*. One of them's a Bart. with a fungus on his nose in Shropshire. He's an uncle. Then there's my sister, if she's not dead—my sister Livy. She's Mrs. Huxtable. I fancy they all think I'm dead in the bush in Australia. I had a narrow squeak there. . . . "

" Now, Gerry darling, I'll tell you what I want you to do. . . . "

" Yes, dear, I will. "

" You can't tell me all these things now, and you'll be ill ; so lie down on the bed there, and I'll sit by you till you go to sleep. Or look, you get to bed comfortably, and I'll be back in a few minutes and sit by you. Just till you go off. Now do as I tell you. "

He obeyed like a child. It was wonderful how, in the returning power of her self-command, she took him, as it were, in hand, and rescued him from the tension of his bewilderment. Apart from the fact that the fibre of her nature was exceptionally strong, her experience of this last hour had removed the most part of the oppression that had weighed her down for more than a twelvemonth—the doubt as to which way a discovery of his past would tell on her husband's love for her. She had no feeling now but anxiety on his behalf, and this really helped her

towards facing the situation calmly. All things do that take us out of ourselves.

She stood again a moment outside Sally's door to make sure she was not moving, then went to her own room, not sorry to be alone. She wanted a pause for the whirl in her brain to stop, for the torrent of new event that had rushed in upon it to find its equilibrium. If Gerry fell asleep before she returned to him so much the better! She did not even light her candle, preferring to be in the dark.

But this did not long defer her return to her husband's room. A very few minutes in the darkness and the silence of her own were enough for her, and she was grateful for both. Then she went back, to find him in bed, sitting up and pressing his fingers on his eyes, as one does when suffering from nervous headache. But he disclaimed any such feeling in answer to her inquiry. She sat down beside him, holding his hand, just as she had done in the night of the storm, and begged him for her sake and his own to try to sleep. It would all seem so much easier and clearer in the morning.

Yes, he would sleep, he said. And, indeed, he had resolved to affect sleep, so as to induce her to go away herself and rest. But it was not so easy. Half-grasped facts went and came—recollections that he knew he should before long be able to marshal in their proper order and make harmonious. For the time being, though they had not the nightmare character of the recurrences he had suffered from before his memory-revival, they stood between him and sleep effectually. But he could and would simulate sleep directly, for Rosalind's sake. He had looked at his watch and seen that it was near two in the morning. Yes, he would sleep; but he must ask one question, or lose his reason if she left him alone with it unanswered.

“Rosey darling!”

“What, dearest?”

“We'll forget the old story, won't we, and only think of *now*? That's the right way to take it, isn't it?”

She kissed his face as she answered, just as she might have kissed a child. “Quite right, dear love,” she said; “and now go to sleep. Or if you must talk a little more, talk about Conrad and Sally.”

“Ah yes!” he answered; “that's all happiness. Conrad and Sally! But there's a thing. . . .”

“What thing, dear? What is it?”

"I shall ask it you in the end, so why not now?" She felt in his hand a shudder that ran through him, as his hold on her fingers tightened.

"So why not now?" she repeated after him. "Why hesitate?"

The tremor strengthened in her hand and was heard in his voice plainly as he answered with an effort: "What became of the baby?"

"What became of the baby!" There was a new terror in Rosalind's voice as she repeated the words—a fear for his reason. "What baby?"

"*The* baby—*his* baby—*his* horrible baby!"

"Gerry darling! Gerry *dearest*! do think..." His puzzled eyes, bloodshot in his white face, turned full upon her; but he remained silent, waiting to hear more. "You have forgotten, darling," she said quietly.

His free hand that lay on the coverlid clenched, and a spasm caught his arm, as though it longed for something to strike or strangle. "No, no!" said he; "I am all right. I mean that damned monster's baby. *There was* a baby?" His voice shook on these last words as though he, too, had a fear for his own reason. His face flushed as he awaited her reply.

"Oh, Gerry darling! but you *have* forgotten. His baby was Sally—my Sallykin!"

For it was absolutely true that, although he had as complete a knowledge, in a certain sense, of Sally's origin as the well-coached student has of the subject he is to answer questions in, he had forgotten it under the stress of his mental trial as readily as the student forgets what his mind has only acquiesced in for its purpose, in his joy at recovering his right to ignorance. Sally had an existence of her own quite independent of her origin. She was his and Rosalind's—a part of *their* existence, a necessity. It was easy and natural for him to dissociate the living, breathing reality that filled so much of their lives from its mere beginnings. It was less easy for Rosalind, but not an impossibility altogether, helped by the forgiveness for the part that grew from the soil of her daughter's love.

"You *had* forgotten, dear," she repeated; "but you know now."

"Yes, I had forgotten, because of Sally herself; but she is *my* daughter now..."

She waited, expecting him to say more: but he did not speak



agani. As soon as he was, or seemed to be, asleep, she rose quietly and left him.

She was so anxious that no trace of the tempest that had passed over her should be left for Sally to see in the morning that she got as quickly as possible to bed; and, with a little effort to tranquillise her mind, soon sank into a state of absolute oblivion. It was the counterswing of the pendulum—Nature's protest against a strain beyond her powers to bear, and its remedy.

## CHAPTER XLIV

A COLOURLESS dawn chased a grey twilight from the sea and white cliffs of St. Sennans, and a sickly effort of the sun to rise visibly, ending above a cloud-bank in a red half-circle that seemed a thing quite unconnected with the struggling light, was baffled by a higher cloud-bank still that came discouragingly from the west, and quenched the hopes of the few early risers who were about as St. Sennans tower chimed six. The gull that flew high above the green waste of white-flecked waters was whiter still against the inky blue of the cloud-curtain that had disallowed the day, and the paler vapour-drifts that paused and changed and lost themselves and died ; but the air that came from the sea was sweet and mild for the time of year, and the verdict of the coastguardsman at the flagstaff, who in pursuance of his sinecure had seen the night out, was that the day was pretty sure to be an uncertain sart, with little froshets on the water, like over yander. He seemed to think that a certainty of uncertainty had all the value of a forecast, and was as well satisfied with his report as he was that he had not seen a smuggler through the telescope he closed as he uttered it.

“ Well, I should judge it might be fairly doubtful,” was the reply of the man he was speaking with. It was the man who had “ Elinor ” and “ Bessie ” tattooed on his arm. They were not legible now, as a couple of life-belts, or hencoops, as they are sometimes called, hung over the arm and hid them. The boy Benjamin was with his father, and carried a third. An explanation of them came in answer to interrogation in the eye of the coastguard. “ Just to put a touch of new paint on ’em against the weather.” The speaker made one movement of his head say that they had come from the pier-end, and another that he had taken them home to repaint by contract.

“ What do you make out of S. S. P. C. ? ” the coastguard asked, scarcely as one who had no theory himself ; more as one archæo-

logist addressing another, teeming with deference, but ready for controversy. The other answered with some paternal pride :

“ Ah, there now ! Young Benjamin, he made *that* good, and asked for to make it red in place of black himself ! Didn't ye, ye young sculping ? St. Sennans Pier Company, that's all it comes to, followed out. But I'm no great schoolmaster myself, and that's God's truth.” Both contemplated the judicious restoration with satisfaction ; and young Benjamin, who had turned purple under publicity, murmured that it was black afower. He didn't seem to mean anything, but to think it due to himself to say something, meaning or no. The coastguardsman merely said, “ Makes a tidy job !” and the father and son went on their way to the pier.

A quarter of an hour before, this coastguard had looked after the visitor in a blue serge suit up at Lobjoit's, who had passed him going briskly towards the fishing-quarter. He had recognised him confidently, for he knew Fenwick well, and saw nothing strange in his early appearance. Now that he saw him returning, and could take full note of him, he almost suspected he had been mistaken, so wild and pallid was the face of this man, who, usually ready with a light word for every chance encounter—even with perfect strangers—now passed him by ungreeted, and to all seeming unconscious of his presence. The coastguard was for a moment in doubt if he should not follow him, inferring something in the nature of delirium from his aspect ; but seeing that he made straight for the pier, and knowing that young Benjamin's father was more familiar with him than himself, he was contented to record in thought that that was a face with a bad day ahead, and leave it.

For Gerry, when Rosalind left him, was rash in assuming he could let her do so safely. His well-meant pretext of sleep was not destined to grow into a reality. He had really believed that it would, so soothing was the touch of her hand in his own. The moment he was alone his mind leapt, willy-nilly, to the analysis of one point or other in the past that had just come back to him. He tried to silence thought, and to sleep, knowing that his best hope was in rest ; but each new effort only ended in his slipping back to what he had just dismissed. And that terrible last interview with Rosey at Umballa, when he parted from her, as he thought, never to see her again, was the Rome to which all the roads of recollection led. Each involuntary visit there had its *renchérissement* on the previous one, and in the end the image



of that hour became a brain-oppression, and wrote the word "fever" large on the tablets of his apprehension.

He knew now it was not to be sleep ; he knew it as he sat up in bed feeling his pulse, and stimulating it with his anxiety that it should go slow. Was there nothing he could take that would make him sleep ? Certainly he knew of nothing, anywhere, except it was to be found by waking Rosalind, probably sound asleep by now. Out of the question ! Oh, why, why, with all the warning he had had, had he neglected to provide himself with a mysterious thing known to him all his life as a soothing-draught ? It would have been so useful now, and Conrad would have defined it down to the prosaic requirements of pharmacy. But it was too late !

So long as her hand was in his, so long as her lips were near his own, what did it matter what he recollected ? The living present cancelled the dead past. But to be there alone in the dark, with the image of that Rosalind of former years clinging to him, and crying for forgiveness because his mind, warped against her by a false conception of the truth, could not forgive ; to be defenceless against her last words, coming through the long interval to him again just as he heard them, twenty years ago, bringing back the other noises of the Indian night—the lowing of the bullocks in the compound, the striking of the hour on the Kutcherry gongs, the grinding of the Persian wheels unceasingly drawing water for the irrigation of the fields—to be exposed to this solitude and ever-growing imagination was to become the soil for a self-sown crop of terrors—fear of fever, fear of madness, fear at the very least of perturbation such that Sally might come, through it, to a knowledge that had to be kept from her at all costs.

He lighted his candle with a cautious match, and found what might be a solace—a lucky newspaper of the morning. If only he could read it without audible rustling, unheard by the sleepers !

The print was almost too small to be read by the light of a single candle ; but there were the usual headings, the usual ranks of capitals that tell us so quick that there is nothing we shall care about in the pale undecipherable paragraphs below, and that we have spent our halfpenny in vain. There was the usual young lady who had bought, or was trying on, a large hat, and whose top-story above, in profile, had got so far ahead of her other stories below. There were the consignments of locust-flights of boots, for this young lady's friends, with heels in the

instep. And all the advertisements that some one *must* believe, or they would not pay for insertion ; but that *we* ignore. incredulous. Fenwick tried hard, for his own sake, to make the whole thing mean something, but his dazed brain and feverish eyes refused to respond to his efforts, and he let the paper go, and gave himself up, a prey to his own memories. After all, the daylight was sure to come in the end to save him.

He tried hard to reason with himself, to force himself to feel the reality of his own belief that all was well ; for he had no doubt of it, as an abstract truth. It was the power of getting comfort from it that was wanting. If only his heart could stop thumping and his brain burning, *he* would have done the rejoicing that Rosalind was there, knowing all he knew, and loving him ; that Sally was there, loving him too, but knowing nothing, and needing to know nothing ; that one of his first greetings in the day to come would be from Conrad Vereker, probably too much intoxicated with his own happiness to give much attention to what he was beginning to acknowledge was some kind of physical or nervous fever. If he could only sleep !

But he could not—could hardly close his eyes. He said to himself again and again that nothing was the matter ; that, if anything, he and Rosey were better off than they had been yet ; that they had passed through a land of peril to a great deliverance. But he did not believe his own assurance, and the throng of memories that his feverish condition would not let sleep, or that were its cause, came on him more and more thickly through all those hours of the dreary night. They came, too, with a growing force, each one as it returned having more the character of a waking dream, vivid almost to the point of reality. But all ended alike. He always found himself breaking away from Rosey in the veranda in the bungalow at Umballa, and could hear again her cry of despair : “ Oh, Gerry, Gerry ! It is not as you think. Oh, stay, stay ! Give me a chance to show you how I love you ! ” The tramp of his horse as he rode away from his home and that white figure left prostrate in the veranda above him, became a real sound that beat painfully upon his ears ; and the voice of the friend he sought—an old soldier in camp at Sabatoo, where he rode almost without a halt—as he roused him in the dawn of the next day, came to him again almost as though spoken in the room beside him : “ Left *your* wife, Palliser ! My God, sir ! what’s to come next ? ” And then the wicked hardness of his own heart, and his stubborn refusal



to listen to the angry remonstrance that followed. "I tell you this, young man! the man's a fool—a damned fool—that runs from the woman who loves him!" And the asseveration that the speaker would say the same if she was anything short of the worst character in camp, only in slightly different words. His remorse for his own obduracy, and the cruelty of his behaviour then; his shame when he thought of his application, months later, to the Court at Lahore—for "relief" from Rosey: just imagine it!—these were bad enough to think back on, even from the point of view of his previous knowledge; but how infinitely worse when he thought what she had been to him, how she had acted towards him two years ago!

Even the painful adventure he could now look back to clearly, and with a rather amused interest, as to an event with no laceration in it—his wandering in an Australian forest, for how many days he could not say, and his final resurrection at a town a hundred miles from his starting-point—even this led him back in the end to the old story. The whole passed through his mind like the scenes of a drama—his confidence, having lost the track, that his horse, left to himself, would find it again; his terror when, coming back from a stone's-throw off, he found the tree deserted he had tied his horse to; his foolish starting off to catch him, when the only sane course was to wait for his return. But the second act of the drama took his mind again to Rosey in her loneliness; for when he was found by a search-party at the foot of a telegraph-post he had used his last match to burn down, he was inarticulate, and seemed to give his name as Harrisson. As he slowly recovered sense and speech at the telegraph-station—for the interruption of the current had been his cry for help to its occupants—he heard himself addressed by the name and saw the mistake; but he did not correct it, being, indeed, not sorry for an incognito, sick of his life, as it were, and glad to change his identity. But how if Rosey wrote to him then—think of it!—under his old name? Fancy *her* when the time came for a possible reply, with who could say what of hope in it! Fancy her many decisions that it was still too soon for an answer, followed by as many others as time went on that it was not too late! If he had received such a letter from her then, might it not all have been different? May she not have written one? He had talked so little with her; nothing forbade the idea. And so his mind travelled round with monotonous return, always to that old time, and those old scenes, and all the pain of them.



It was curious—he noted the oddity himself—that his whole life in America took the drama character, and *he* became the spectator. He never caught himself playing his own part over again, with all its phases of passion or excitement, as in the earlier story. In that, his identification of himself with his past grew and grew, and as his fever increased through the small hours of the morning, got more and more the force of a waking dream. And when the dawn came at last, and a gleam from the languid sun followed it, the man who got up and looked out towards its great blue bank of cloud was only half sure he was not another former self, looking out towards another sea, twenty years ago, to see if he could identify the ship that was to take him from Kurachi to Port Jackson.

What did it all mean? Yes, sure enough he had taken his passage, and to-morrow leagues of sea would lie between him and Rosey. That would end it for ever. No reconciliations, no repentance then! . . . Was there not still time? a chance if he chose to catch at it? Puny irresolution! Shake it all off, and have done with it. . . . He shuddered as he thought through his old part again, and then came back with a jerk to the strange knowledge that he was opening a closed book, a tragedy written twenty years ago; and that there, within a few feet of where he gazed with a jaded sight out to the empty sea, was Rosey herself, alive and breathing; and in an hour or two he was to see her, feel the touch of her hand and lips, be his happy self again of three days only gone by, if he could but face masterfully the strange knowledge this mysterious revival of a former self had brought upon him. And there was Sally. . . .

But at the name, as it came to his mind, came also the shock of another mystery—who and what was Sally?

Let him lie down again and try to think quietly. Was not this part of his delirium? Could he have got the story right? Surely! Was it not of her that Rosey had said, only a few hours since, "*His* baby was Sally—*my* Sallykin?" And was he not then able to reply collectedly and with ease, "She is *my* daughter now," and to feel the power of his choice that it should be so. But the strength of Rosalind was beside him then, and now he was here alone. He beat off—fought against—that hideous fatherhood of Sally's that he could not bear, that image that he felt might drive him mad. Oh, villain, villain! Far, far worse to him was—perforce must be—this miscreant's crime than that mere murder that shook Hamlet's reason to its founda-

tion. He dared not think of it lest he should cry out aloud. But, patience! Only two or three hours more, and Rosalind would be there to help him to bear it. . . . What a coward's thought!—to help him to bear what she herself had borne in silence for twenty years!

Would he not be better up, now that it was light? Of course! But how be sure he should not wake them?

Well, the word was caution; he must be very quiet about it, that was all. He slipped on his clothes without washing—it always makes a noise—ran a comb through the tangled hair his pillow-tossings of four hours had produced, and got away stealthily without accident, or meeting any early riser, speech with whom would have betrayed him.

He had little trouble with the door-fastenings, that often perplex us in a like case, blocking egress with mysterious mechanisms. Housebreakers were rare in St. Sennans. He had more fear his footsteps would be audible; but it seemed not, and he walked away towards the cliff pathway unnoticed.

The merpussy waked to a consciousness of happiness undefined, a sense of welcome to the day. What girl would not have done so, under her circumstances? For Sally had no doubt in her mind of her own satisfaction at the outcome of yesterday. She might have treated the feelings and experience of other lovers—regular ones, prone to nonsense—with contempt, but she never questioned the advantages of her own position as compared with theirs. Her feast was better cooked, altogether more substantial and real than the kickshaws and sweetmeats she chose to ascribe to the *menus* of Arcadia. Naturally; because see what a much better sort Conrad was! It was going to be quite a different kind of thing this time. And as for the old Goody, she was not half bad. Nothing was half bad in Sally's eyes that morning, and almost everything was wholly good.

She had slept so sound she was sure it was late. But it was only half-past six, and the early greetings of Mrs. Lobjoit below were not to the baker, nor even to the milk, but to next door, which was dealing with the question of its mat and clean step through the agency of its proprietress, whose voice chimed cheerfully with Mrs. Lobjoit's over the surprise of the latter finding *her* street door had been opened, and that some one had already passed out. For Mrs. Lobjoit had made *that* sure, the night before, that she had "shot to" the bottom bolt that



would shet, *because* she had ignored as useless the top bolt that *wouldn't* shet—the correlation of events so often appealed to by witnesses under examination; which Law, stupidly enough, prides itself on snubbing them for. Further, Mrs. Lobjoit would have flown to the solution that it was her gentleman gone out, only that it was quite into the night before they stopped from talking.

Sally heard this because she had pulled down the top sash of her window to breathe the sea air, regardless of the fact she well knew, and described thus—that the sash-weight stuck and clunked and wouldn't come down. She decided against running the risk of disturbing Jeremiah on the strength of Mrs. Lobjoit's impressions; although, if he had gone out, she certainly would follow him. But she slipped on a dressing-gown and went half-way downstairs, to see if his hat was still on its peg. It was gone. So she went back to her room, and dressed furtively. Because if they *had* been talking late into the night, it would be just as well for her mother to have her sleep out.

But she had hardly finished washing when she became aware of a footstep outside—Jeremiah's certainly. She went to the window, saw him approach the house, look up at it, but as though he did not recognise that she was there, and then turn away towards the flagstaff and the old town. It was odd and unlike him, and Sally was alarmed. Besides, how white he looked!

Bear this in mind, that Sally knew absolutely nothing of the cataclysm of revived memory in Jeremiah. Remember that the incident of the galvanic battery at the pier-end is only four days old. Do not be misled by the close details we have given of these four days.

Sally's alarm at the haggard look of her stepfather's face took away her breath; at least, she did not find her voice soon enough for him to hear her call out—she did not like to shout loud because of her mother—as he turned away. Or it seemed so, for that was the only way she could account for his walking away so abruptly. In her hurry to get dressed and follow him, she caught up an undergarment that lay on the floor, without seeing that her own foot was on the tape that was to secure it, and a rip and partial disruption was the consequence. Never mind, it would hold up till she came in. Or, if it didn't, where was that safety-pin that was on her dressing-table yesterday? Not there? Again, never mind! She would do, somehow. She hurried on her clothes, and her hat and waterproof, and left



the house, going quickly on what she supposed to be the track of Jeremiah, who was, by now, no longer visible.

But she caught sight of him returning, while she was still two or three minutes' walk short of the flagstaff he was approaching from the other side. He would stop to talk with the coast-guard. He always did. Surely he would, this time. But no—he didn't.

He may have spoken, but he did not stop. So Sally noted as she hesitated an instant, seeing him turn off at an angle and go towards the pier. There was a shorter cut to the pier, without going to the flagstaff. Sally turned herself, and took it. She would catch him as he came back from the pier-end, if he was going to walk along it.

She saw him as she descended the slope that, part pathway and part steps, led down towards the sea. He walked straight towards the pier, passing as he went a man and boy, who were carrying what she took, at that distance, for well-made coils of rope; and then, arriving at the pier-turnstile just as they did, pass them, and, leaving them apparently in conversation with the gatekeeper, walk steadily on towards the pier-end.

“I shouldn't call the paint properly hardened on myself. Nor won't be yet-a-piece, if you ask my opinion.” It was young Benjamin's father said these words to the veteran in charge of the pier-turnstile; who, as an early bird, was counting his tickets, so to speak, before they were hatched—his actual professional cabinet-séance not having begun. For the pier wasn't open yet, and his permission to Fenwick to pass the open side-gate was an indulgence to an acquaintance.

His reply to the speaker was that we must bide awhile in patience, then. Paint was good to dry while the grass grew, and there was plenty else to fret about for them as wanted it. He seemed only to mention this from consideration of the wants of others. He either had plenty to fret about, or was happier without anything. He ended with, “What have you to say to that, Jake Tracy?” showing that the father of Benjamin was Jacob, following precedent.

But Jacob preferred not to be led away into ethics. “I should stand 'em by, in the shadow, for the matter of a day or two,” said he. “In yander.” And the life-belts being safely disposed of, he added: “I thought to carry back number fower from the pier-end, and make a finish of the job. But looking

to the condition of this paint, maybe better leave her for service. She'll do as well next week." But the moralist inclined to make a finish of the job. Who was going overboard afore the end of next week? And supposing they did, the resources of civilisation wouldn't be exhausted, for we could throw 'em a clean one, paint or no.

"Send your lad to fetch her along, Jake. I'll make myself answerable." And young Benjamin, confirmed by a nod from his father, departed for the mysteriously feminine hencoop.

Just as the boy turned to go, Fenwick came up, and, paying no attention to greetings from the two men, passed through the side-gate and walked rather briskly away along the pier. Each of the men looked at the other, as though asking a question. But neither answered, and then both said, "Queer, too!" A nascent discussion of whether one or other should not follow him—for the look of his face had gone home to both, as he was, of course, well known to them—was cut short by Jacob Tracy saying, "Here's his daughter coming to see for him." And, just after, Sally had passed them, leaving them pleasantly stirred by the bright smile and eye-flash that seemed this morning brighter than ever. The boy shouted something from the pier-end, to which his father's shouted reply was that he must bide a minute and he would come to see himself.

"The yoong beggar's got the use of his eyes," he said, not hurrying. "I'll go bail he'll find her. She's there all right, I suppose?" He was still referring to the hencoop, not to any lady.

"Ah, *she's* there, quite safe. You'd best step along and find her. Boys are boys, when all's told."

But Jacob wanted Benjamin to distinguish himself, and still didn't hurry. The strange appearance of Mrs. Lobjoit's gentleman supplied materials for chat. Presently his son shouted again, and he answered, "Not there, is she? I'll come." He walked away towards the pier-end just as Sally, who had fancied Jeremiah would be somewhere alongside of the pagoda-building that nearly covered it, came back from her voyage of exploration, and looked down the steps to the under-platform, that young Benjamin had just come up shouting.

What little things life and death turn on sometimes!

## CHAPTER XLV

FENWICK, haunted by the phantoms of his own past—always, as his fever grew, assuming more and more the force of realities—but convinced of their ephemeral nature, and that the crisis of this fever would pass and leave him free, had walked quickly along the sea front towards the cliff pathway. Had Dr. Conrad seen him as he passed below his window and looked up at it, he would probably have suspected something and followed him. And then the events of this story would have travelled a different road. But Vereker, possessed by quite another sort of delirium, had risen even earlier—almost with the dawn—and, taking Sally's inaccessibility at that unearthly hour for granted, had gone for a long walk over what was now to him a land of enchantment—the same ground he and Sally had passed over on the previous evening. He and his mother would be on their way to London in a few hours, and he would like to see the landmarks that were to be a precious memory for all time yet once more while he had the chance. Who could say that he would ever visit St. Sennans again?

If Fenwick, in choosing this direction first, had a half-formed idea of attracting the doctor's attention, the appearance of Mrs. Iggulden's shuttered parlour-window would have discouraged him. It told a tale of a household still asleep, and quite truly as far as she herself was concerned. For Dr. Conrad, as might have been expected, was very late in coming home the night before; and his mother's peculiarity of not being able to sleep if kept up till eleven, combined with the need of a statement of her position, a declaration of policy, and almost a budget, if not quite, on the subject of her son's future housekeeping, having resulted in what threatened to become an all-night sitting, the good woman's dozes and repentances, with jerks, on the stairs overnight, had produced their consequences in the morning. Fenwick passed the house, and walked on as far as where the



path rose to the cliffs ; then turned back, and, pausing a moment, as we have seen, under Sally's window, failed in his dreamy state to see her as she looked over the cross-bar at him, and then went on towards the old town. It may be she was not very visible ; the double glasses of an open sash-window are almost equal to opacity. But even with that, the extreme aberration of Fenwick's mind at the moment is the only way to account for his not seeing her.

In fact, his mental perturbation came and went by gusts, as his memory caught at or relinquished agitating points of reminiscence, always dwelling on that parting from Rosalind at Umballa. His brain and nervous system were in a state that involved a climax and reaction ; and, unhappily, this climax, during which his identification of his present self with his memory of its past was intensified to the point of absolute hallucination, came at an inopportune moment. If he could only have kept the phantoms of his imagination at bay until he met Sally ! But, really, speculation on so strange a frame of mind is useless ; we can only accept the facts as they stand.

He had no recollection afterwards of what followed when he passed the house and failed to see Sally or hear her call out to him. For the time being he was back again in his life of twenty years ago. Those who find this hard to believe may see no way of accounting for what came about but by ascribing to Fenwick an intention of suicide. For our part we believe him to have been absolutely incapable of such an act from a selfish impulse ; and, moreover, it is absurd to impute to him such a motive, at this time, however strongly he might have been impelled towards it by discovering the injustice and cruelty of his own unforgiveness towards his young wife at some previous time—as, for instance, in America—when she herself was beyond his reach, and a recantation of his error impossible. Unless we accept his conduct as the result of a momentary dementia, produced by overstrain, it must remain inexplicable.

It appeared to him, so far as he was afterwards able to define or record it, that he was no longer walking on the familiar track between the few lodging-houses that made up the old St. Sennans, and the still older fishing quarter near the jetty, but that he was again on his way from Lahore to Kurachi, from which he was to embark for a new land where his broken heart might do its best to heal ; for if ever a man was utterly broken-hearted it was he when he came away from Lahore, after his futile attempt to

procure a divorce. He no longer saw the cold northern sea under its great blue cloud-curtain that had shrouded the coming day ; nor the line of fishing-smacks, beached high and dry, and their owners' dwellings near at hand, a little town of tar and timber in behind the stowage-huts of nets and tackle, nor the white escarpment of the cliffs beyond, that the sea had worked so many centuries to plunder from the rounded pastures of the sheep above. He no longer heard the music of the waves on the shingle, nor the cry of the sea-bird that swept over them, nor the tinkle of the sheep-bell the wind knows how to carry so far in the stillness of the morning, nor the voices of the fisher-children playing in the boats that one day may bear them to their death. His mind was far away in the Indian heat, parching and suffocated on the long railway journey from Lahore to Kurachi, scarcely better when he had reached his first boat that was to take him to Bombay, to embark again a day or two later for Australia. How little he had forgotten of the short but tedious delay in that chaotic emporium of all things European and Asiatic, that many-coloured meeting-ground of a thousand nationalities ! How little, that the whole should come back to him now, and fill his brain with its reality, till the living present grew dim and vanished ; reviving now and again, as fiction, read in early years, revives with a suggested doubt—is it true or false ?

He sat again on the Esplanade at Bombay, as the sun vanished in a flood of rosy gold, and released the world from his heat. He felt again the relief of the evening wind ; heard again the chat of a group of English officers who sipped sherry-cobblers at a table a few paces off. "I always change my mind," said one of them, "backwards and forwards till the last minute ; then I make it the last one." He quite understood this man's speech, and thought how like himself ! For from the time he left Lahore he, too, had gone backwards and forwards, now resolving to return, come what might, now telling himself firmly there was no remedy but in distance apart, and all there might be of oblivion. Was there not yet time ? He could still go back, even now. But no ; the old obduracy was on him. Rosey had deceived him !

Then he seemed to have come again to *his* last minute. Once he was fairly on the ship that was even now coaling for her voyage, once the screw was on the move and the shore-lights vanishing, the die would be cast. The stars that he and Rosey



had seen in that cool English garden that night he met her first would vanish, too, and a world would be between them. Still, the hour had not come ; it was not too late yet. But still the inveterate thought came back—she *had* deceived him.

So his delirium ended as its prototype of over twenty years ago had ended. He hardened his heart, thrust aside all thought of forgiveness and repentance, and went resolutely down to the quay, as he thought, to embark on the little boat for the ship, and so practically put all thought of hesitation and return out of his mind. This moment was probably what would have been the crisis of his fever, and it was an evil hour for him in which the builder of the pier at St. Sennans made it so like the platform of that experience of long ago. But the boat that he saw before him as he stepped unhesitatingly over its edge was only the image of a distempered brain, and in an instant he was struggling with the cold, dark water. A sudden shock of chill, an intolerable choking agony of breath involuntarily held, an instantaneous dissipation of his dream, the natural result of the shock, and Fenwick knew himself for what he was, and fought the cruel water in his despair. Even so a drowning man fights who in old failures to learn swimming has just mastered its barest rudiments. A vivid pageant rushed across his mind of all the consequences of what seemed to him now his inevitable death, clearest of all a sad vision of Sally and Rosalind returning to their home alone—the black dresses and the silence. He found voice for one long cry for help, without a hope that it could be heard or that help could be at hand.

But he was neither unseen nor unheard, as you will know if we have not failed in showing the succession of events. Sally never hesitated an instant as she caught sight of the delirious man's involuntary plunge into the green waves that had no terrors for *her*. She threw off as she ran, fast, fast down the wooden stairway, the only clothes she could get rid of—her hat and light summer cloak—and went straight, with a well-calculated dive, to follow him and catch him as he rose. If only she did not miss him ! Let her once pinion his arms from behind, and she would get him ashore even if no help came. Why, there was no sea to speak of !

The man Jacob Tracy, the father of Benjamin, saw something to quicken his speed as he walked along the pier to help in the discovery of the life-belt. Why did the swimming young lady



from Lobjoit's want to be rid of her wrap-up at that rate as she turned so sharp round to run down the ladder? He increased a brisk walk to a run as the lad, who had followed the young lady down the steps, came running up again; for there was hysterical terror in his voice—he was a mere boy—as he shouted something that became, as distance lessened, “In t' wa-ater! in t' wa-ater! in t' wa-ater! in t' wa-ater!” And he was waving something in his hand—a lady's hat surely; for with an instinct of swift presence of mind—a quality that is the breath of life to all that go down to the sea in ships, mariners or fisher-folk—he had seen that the headgear Sally threw away would tell its tale quicker than any words he could rely on finding.

“Roon smart, yoong Benjamin—roon for the bo'ats and call out ‘oars!’ Roon, boy—you've no time to lose!” And as the father dashes down the steps he spoke of as “the ladder” the son runs for all he is worth to carry the alarm to the shore. He shouts, “Oars, oars, oars!” as he was told. But it is not needed, for his thought of bringing up the hat has done his work already for him. The coastguard, though the pier itself hid the two immersions from him, is quick of apprehension and ready with his glass, and has seen the boy's return from below; and at the same time heard, not his words, but the terror in them, and by some mysterious agency has sent a flying word along the beach that has brought a population out to help.

A bad time of the tide to get a boat off sharp, and a long shelving run of sandy shingle before we reach the sea; for all the boats are on the upper strand of the beach, above the last high-water mark, and the flow of the tide is scarcely an hour old. There is a short squat cobble, flat-bottomed and of intolerable weight, down near the waters, and its owner makes for it. Another man drives him out seawards, against the constant lift of breaking waves, large enough to be troublesome, small enough to be numerous. They give no chance to the second man to leap into the boat, so deep has he to go, pushing on until the pads are out and the boat controlled; but he has barely time to feel the underdraw of the recoiling wave when the straight scour of a keel comes down along the sand and pebbles—the Ellen Jane, St. Sennans—half-pushed, half-borne by a crew three minutes have extemporised. You two in the bows, and you two astern, and the spontaneous natural leader—the man the emergency makes—at the tiller-ropes, and Ellen Jane is off, well drenched at the outset. An oar swings round high in the air,

not to knock one of you two astern into the water, and then, "Give way!" and then the short, quick rhythm of the stroke, and four men at their utmost stress, each knowing life and death may hang upon the greatness of his effort.

The cobble is soon outshot, but its owner will not give in. He bears away from the course of the boat that has passed him, to seek their common object where the tide-drift may have swept it, beyond some light craft at their moorings which would have hidden it for a while. He has the right of it this time, for as he passes, straining at his sculls, under the stern of a pleasure-yacht at anchor, his eye is caught by a black spot rising on a wave, and he makes for it. Not too fast at the last, though, but cautiously, so as to grasp the man with the life-belt and hold him firm till help shall come to get him on board. He might easily have overshot him; but he has him now, and the four-oar sights him as she swings round between the last-moored boat and the pier; and comes apace, the quicker for the tide.

"What is it ye say, master? What do ye make it out the gentleman says, Peter?" For Fenwick, hauled on board the cobble with the help of a man from the other boat, who returns to his oar, is alive and conscious, but not much more. A brandy-flask comes from somewhere in the steerage, where a mop and a tin pot and a boathook live, and its effect is good. The half-drowned man becomes articulate enough to justify the report, "It's his daughter he's asking for—overboard, too!" and then the man who spoke first says: "You be easy in your mind, master; we'll find her. Bear away a bit, and lie to, Tom." Tom is the man in the cobble, and he does as he is bidden. He ships his sculls and drifts, watching round on all sides for what may be just afloat near the surface. The four-oar remains, and the eyes of her crew are straining hard to catch a sight of anything that is not mere lift and ripple of a wave.

Then more boats one after another, and more, and the gathering crowd that lines the shore sees them scatter and lie to, some way apart, to watch the greater space of water. All drift, because they know that what they seek is drifting, too, and that if they move they lose their only chance; for the thing they have to find is so small, so small, and that great waste of pitiless sea is so large. It is their only chance.

The crowd, always growing, moves along the beach as the flotilla of drifting boats move slowly with the tide. They can hear the shouting from boat to boat, but catch but little of the

words. They follow on, with little speech among themselves, and hope dying slowly out of their hearts. Gradually towards the jetty, where the girl they are seeking sat, only a few days since, beside the man whose heart the memory of yesterday is still rejoicing; the only trouble of whose unconscious soul is the thought that he and she must soon be parted, however short the term of their separation may be. He will know more soon.

Suddenly the shouting increases in the boats, and excited voices break the silence on the shore. It won't do to hope too much, but surely all the boats are thickening to one spot. . . . No, it's nothing! . . . Yes, it *is*—it *is* something—one knows what—sighted abaft the Mary Jane, whose steersman catches it with a boathook as the oars we on the beach saw suddenly drop back water—slowly, cautiously—and only wait for him to drag the light weight athwart the gunwale to row for the dear life towards the town. The scattered crowd turns and comes back, trampling the shingle, to meet the boat as she lands, and follow what she brings to the nearest haven.



## CHAPTER XLVI

"Is that you, Dr. Conrad?" It was Rosalind who spoke, through the half-open window of her bedroom, to the happy, expectant face of the doctor in the little front garden below. "I'm only just up, and they're both gone out. I shall be down in a few minutes." For she had looked into her husband's room, and then into Sally's, and concluded they must have gone out together. So much the better! If Sally was with him, no harm could come to him.

"I don't see them anywhere about," said the doctor. Sally had not been gone ten minutes, and at this moment had just caught sight of Fenwick making for the pier. The short cut down took her out of sight of the house. Rosalind considered a minute.

"Very likely they've gone to the hotel—the 'beastly hotel,' you know." There is the sound of a laugh, and the caress in her voice, as she thinks of Sally, whom she is quoting. "Gerry found a friend there last night—a German gentleman—who was to go at seven-fifty. Very likely he's walked up to say good-bye to him. Suppose you go to meet them! How's Mrs. Vereker this morning?"

"Do you know, I haven't seen her yet! We talked rather late, so I left without waking her. I've been for a walk."

"Well, go and meet Gerry. I feel pretty sure he's gone there." And thereon Dr. Conrad departed, and so, departing towards the new town, lost sight for the time being of the pier and the coast. He went by the steps and Albion Villas, and as he caught a glimpse therefrom of the pier-end in the distance, had an impression of a man running along it and shouting; but he drew no inferences, although it struck him there was panic, with the energy of sudden action, in this man's voice.

He arrived at the hotel, of course without meeting either Sally or Fenwick. He had accepted them as probably there, on perhaps

too slight evidence. But they might be in the hotel. Had the German gentleman gone?—he asked. The stony woman he addressed replied from her precinct, with no apparent consciousness that she was addressing a fellow-creature, that No. 148, if you meant him, had paid and gone by last 'bus. She spoke as to space, but as one too indifferent on all points to care much who overheard her.

Vereker thanked her, and turned to go. As he departed he caught a fragment of conversation between her and the waiter who had produced the brandy the evening before. He was in undress uniform—a holland or white-jean jacket, and a red woollen comforter. He had lost his voice, or most of it, and croaked; and his cold had got worse in the night. He was shedding tears copiously, and wiping them on a cruet-stand he carried in one hand. The other was engaged by an empty coal-scuttle with a pair of slippers in it, inexplicably.

"There's a start down there. Party over the pier-end! Dr. Maccoll he's been 'phoned for."

"Party from this hotel?"

"Couldn't say. Porcibly. No partic'lars to identify, so far."

"They're not bringing him here?"

"Couldn't say, miss; but I should say they wasn't myself."

"If you know you can say. Who told you, and what did *he* say? Make yourself understood."

"Dr. Maccoll he's been 'phoned for. You can enquire and see if I ain't right. Beyond that I take no responsibility."

The Lady of the Bureau came out; moved, no doubt, by an image of a drowned man whose resources would not meet the credits she might be compelled to give him. She came out to the front through the swing-door, looked up and down the road, and seemed to go back happier. Dr. Conrad's curiosity was roused, and he started at once for the beach, but absolutely without a trace of personal misgiving. No doubt the tendency we all have to impute public mishaps to a special class of people outside our own circle had something to do with this. As he passed down an alley behind some cottages—a short way to the pier—he was aware of a boy telling a tale in a terrified voice to a man and an elderly woman. It was the man with the striped shirt, and the boy was young Benjamin. He had passed on a few paces when the man called to him, and came running after him, followed by the woman and boy.

"I ask your pardon, sir—I ask your pardon. . . ." What he

has to say will not allow him to speak, and his words will not come. He turns for help to his companion. "*You* tell him, Martha woman," he says, and gives in.

"My master thinks, sir, you may find something on the beach. . . ."

"Something on the beach! . . ." Fear is coming into Dr. Conrad's face and voice.

"Find something has happened on the beach. But they've got him out. . . ."

"Got him out! Got whom out? Speak up, for Heaven's sake!"

"It might be the gentleman you know, sir, and. . . ." But the speaker's husband, having left the telling to his wife, unfairly strikes in here, to have the satisfaction of lightening the communication. "But *he's* out safe, sir. You may rely on the young lad." He has made it harder for his wife to tell the rest, and she hesitates. But Dr. Conrad has stayed for no more. He is going at a run down the sloped passage that leads to the sea. The boy follows him, and by some dexterous use of private thoroughfares, known to him, but not to the doctor, arrives first, and is soon visible ahead, running towards the scattered groups that line the beach. The man and woman follow more slowly.

Few of those who read this, we hope, have ever had to face a shock so appalling as the one that Conrad Vereker sustained when he came to know what it was that was being carried up the beach from the boat that had just been driven stern on to the shingle, as he emerged to a full view of the sea and the running crowd, thickening as its last stragglers arrived to meet it. But most of us who are not young have unhappily had some experience of the sort, and many will recognise (if we can describe it) the feeling that was his in excess when a chance bystander—not unconcerned, for no one was that—used in his hearing a phrase that drove the story home to him, and forced him to understand. "It's the swimming girl from Lobjoit's, and she's drowned." It was as well, for he had to know. What did it matter how he became the blank thing standing there, able to say to itself, "Then Sally is dead," and to attach their meaning to the words, but not to comprehend why he went on living? One way of learning the thing that closes over our lives and veils the sun for all time is as good as another; but how he came to be so colourlessly calm about it?

If we could know how each man feels who hears in the felon's dock the sentence of penal servitude for life, it may be we should



find that Vereker's sense of being for the moment a cold, unexplained unit in an infinite unfeeling void, was no unusual experience. But this unit knew mechanically what had happened perfectly well, and its duty was clear before it. Just half a second for this sickness to go off, and he would act.

It was a longer pause than it seemed to him, as all things appeared to happen quickly in it, somewhat as in a photographic life-picture when the films are run too quick. At least, that remained his memory of it. And during that time he stood and wondered why he could not feel. He thought of her mother and of Fenwick, and said to himself they were to be pitied more than he ; for they were human, and *could* feel it—could really know what jewel they had lost—had hearts to grieve and eyes to weep with. He had nothing—was a stupid blank ! Oh, he had been mistaken about himself and his love : he was a stone.

A few moments later than his first sight of that silent crowd—moments in which the world had changed and the sun had become a curse ; in which he had for some reason—not grief, for he could not grieve—resolved on death, except in an event he dared not hope for—he found himself speaking to the men who had borne up the beach the thing whose germ of life, if it survived, was *his* only chance of life hereafter.

“ I am a doctor ; let me come.” The place they had brought it to was a timber structure that was held as common property by the fisher-world, and known as Lloyd's Coffeehouse. It was not a coffeehouse, but a kind of spontaneous club-room, where the old men sat and smoked churchwarden pipes, and told each other tales of storm and wreck, and how the news of old sea-battles came to St. Sennans in their boyhood ; of wives made widows for their country's good, and men all sound of limb when the first gun said “ Death ! ” across the water, crippled for all time when the last said “ Victory ! ” and there was silence and the smell of blood. Over the mantel was an old print of the battle of Camperdown, with three-deckers in the smoke, flanked by portraits of Rodney and Nelson. There was a long table down the centre that had been there since the days of Rodney, and on this was laid what an hour ago was Sally ; what each man present fears to uncover the face of, but less on his own account than for the sake of the only man who seems fearless, and lays hands on the cover to remove it ; for all knew, or guessed, what this dead woman might be—might have been—to this man.

“ I am a doctor ; let me come.”

“ Are ye sure ye know, young master ? Are ye sure, boy ?”

The speaker, a very old man, interposes a trembling hand to save Vereker from what he may not anticipate, perhaps has it in mind to beseech him to give place to the local doctor, just arriving. But the answer is merely, “ I know.” And the hand that uncovers the dead face never wavers, and then that white thing we see is all there is of Sally—that coil and tangle of black hair, all mixed with weed and sea-foam, is the rich mass that was drying in the sun that day she sat with Fenwick on the beach ; those eyes that strain behind the half-closed eyelids were the merry eyes that looked up from the water at the boat she dived from two days since ; those lips are the lips the man who stands beside her kissed but yesterday for the first time. The memory of that kiss is on him now as he wipes the sea-slime from them and takes the first prompt steps for their salvation.

The old Scotch doctor, who came in a moment later, wondered at the resolute decision and energy Vereker was showing. He had been told credibly of the circumstances of the case, and gave way on technical points connected with resuscitation, surrendering views he would otherwise have contended for about Marshall Hall's and Sylvester's respective systems. Perhaps one reason for this was that auscultation of the heart convinced him that the case was hopeless, and he may have reflected that if any other method than Dr. Vereker's was used that gentleman was sure to believe the patient might have been saved. Better leave him to himself.

Rosalind returned to her dressing, after Dr. Conrad walked away from the house, with a feeling—not a logical one—that now she need not hurry. Why having spoken with him and forwarded him on to look for Sally and Gerry should make any difference was not at all clear, and she did not account to herself for it. She accepted it as an occurrence that put her somehow in touch with the events of the day—made her a part of what was going on elsewhere. She had felt lapsed, for the moment, when, waking suddenly to advanced daylight, she had gone first to her husband's room and then to Sally's, and found both empty. The few words spoken from her window with her recently determined son-in-law had switched on her current again, metaphorically speaking.

So she took matters easily, and was at rest about her husband,



in spite of the episode of the previous evening—rather, we should have said, of the small hours of that morning. The fact is, it was her first sleep she had waked from, an unusually long and sound one after severe tension, and in the ordinary course of events she would probably have gone to sleep again. Instead, she had got up at once, and gone to her husband's room to relieve her mind about him. A momentary anxiety at finding it empty disappeared when she found Sally's empty also; but by that time she was effectually waked, and rang for Mrs. Lobjoit and the hot water.

If Mrs. Lobjoit, when she appeared with it, had been able to give particulars of Sally's departure, and to say that she and Mr. Fenwick had gone out separately, Rosalind would have felt less at ease about him; but nothing transpired to show that they had not gone out together. Mrs. Lobjoit's data were all based on the fact that she found the street door open when she went to do down her step, and she had finished this job and gone back into the kitchen by the time Sally followed Fenwick out. Of course, she never came upstairs to see what rooms were empty; why should she? And as no reason for enquiry presented itself, the question was never raised by Rosalind. Sally was naturally an earlier bird than herself, and quite as often as not she would join Gerry in his walk before breakfast.

How thankful she felt, now that the revelation was over, that Sally was within reach to help in calming down the mind that had been so terribly shaken by it; for all her thoughts were of Gerry; on her own behalf she felt nothing but contentment. Think what her daily existence had been! What had she to lose by a complete removal of the darkness that had shrouded her husband's early life with her—or rather, what had she not to gain? Now that it had been assured to her that nothing in the past could make a new rift between them, the only weight upon her mind was the possible necessity for revealing to Sally in the end the story of her parentage. What mother, to whom a like story of her own early days was neither more nor less than a glimpse into Hell, could have felt otherwise about communicating it to her child? She felt, too, the old feeling of the difficulty there would be in making Sally understand. The girl had not chanced across devildom enough to make her an easy recipient of such a tale.

Oh, the pleasure with which she recalled his last words of the night before: "She is *my* daughter now!" It was the final



ratification of the protest of her life against the "rights" that Law and Usage grant to technical paternity; rights that can only be abrogated or ignored by a child's actual parent—its mother—at the cost of insult and contumely from a world that worships its own folly and ignores its own gods. Sally was hers—her own—hard as the terms of her possession had been, and she had assigned a moiety of her rights in her to the man she loved. What was the fatherhood of blood alone to set against the one her motherhood had a right to concede, and had conceded, in response to the spontaneous growth of a father's love? What claim had devilish cruelty and treachery to any share in their result—a result that, after all, was the only compensation possible to their victim?

We do not make this endeavour to describe Rosalind's frame of mind with a view to either endorsing or disclaiming her opinions. We merely record them as those of a woman whose life-story was an uncommon one; but not without a certain sympathy for the new definition of paternity their philosophy involves, backed by a feeling that its truth is to some extent acknowledged in the existing marriage-laws of several countries. As a set-off against this, no woman can have a child entirely her own except by incurring what are called "social disadvantages." The hare that breaks covert incurs social disadvantages. A happy turn of events had shielded Rosalind from the hounds, or they had found better sport elsewhere. And her child was her own.

But even as the thought was registered in her mind, that child lay lifeless; and her husband, stunned and dumb in his despair, dared not even long that she, too, should know, to share his burden.

"Those people are taking their time," said she. Not that she was pressingly anxious for them to come home. It was early still, and the more Gerry lived in the present the better. Sally and her lover were far and away the best foreground for the panorama of his mind just now, and she herself would be quite happy in the middle distance. There would be time and enough hereafter, when the storm had subsided, for a revelation of all those vanished chapters of his life in Canada and elsewhere.

It was restful to her, after the tension and trial of the night, to feel that he was happy with Sally and poor Prosy. What did it really matter how long they dawdled? She could hear in anticipation their voices and the laughter that would tell her

of their coming. In a very little while it would be a reality, and, after all, the pleasure of a good symposium over Sally's betrothal was still to come. She and Gerry and the two principals had not spoken of it together yet. That would be a real happiness. How seldom it was that an engagement to marry gave such complete satisfaction to bystanders! And, after all, *they* are the ones to be consulted; not the insignificant bride and bridegroom elect. Perhaps, though, she was premature in this case. Was there not the Octopus? But then she remembered with pleasure that Conrad had represented his mother as phenomenally genial in her attitude towards the new arrangement; as having, in fact, a claim to be considered not only a bestower of benign consent, but an accomplice before the fact. Still, Rosalind felt her own reserves on the subject, although she had always taken the part of the Octopus on principle when she thought Sally had become too disrespectful towards her. Anyhow, no use to beg and borrow troubles! Let her dwell on the happiness only that was before them all. She pictured a variety of homes for Sally in the time to come, peopling them with beautiful grandchildren—only, mind you, this was to be many, many years ahead! She could not cast herself for the part of grandmother while she twined that glorious hair into its place with hands that for softness and whiteness would have borne comparison with Sally's own.

In the old days, before the news of evil travelled fast, the widowed wife would live for days, weeks, months, unclouded by the knowledge of her loneliness, rejoicing in the coming hour that was to bring her wanderer back; and even as her heart laughed to think how now, at last, the time was drawing near for his return, his heart had ceased to beat, and, it may be, his bones were already bleaching where the assassin's knife had left him in the desert; or were swaying to and fro, in perpetual monotonous response to the ground-swell, in some strange green reflected light of a sea-cavern no man's eye had ever seen; or buried nameless in a common tomb with other victims of battle or of plague; or, worst of all, penned in some dungeon, mad to think of home, waking from dreams of *her* to the terror of the intolerable night, its choking heat or deadly chill. And all those weeks or months the dearth of news would seem just the chance of a lost letter, no more—a thing that may happen any day to any of us. And she would live on in content and hope, jesting even in anticipation of his return.



Even so Rosalind, happy and undisturbed, dwelt on the days that were to come for the merpussy and poor Prosy, as she still had chosen to call him, for her husband and herself ; and all the while *there*, so near her, was the end of it all, written in letters of death.

They were taking their time, certainly, those people ; so she would put her hat on and go to meet them. Mrs. Lobjoit wasn't to hurry breakfast, but wait till they came. All right !

It looked as if it would rain later, so it was just as well to get out a little now. Rosalind was glad of the sweet air off the sea, for the night still hung about her. The tension of it was on her still, for all that she counted herself so much the better, so much the safer, for that interview with Gerry. But oh, what a thing to think that now he knew *her* as she had known him from the beginning ! How much they would have to tell each other, when once they were well in calm water ! . . . Why were those girls running, and why did that young man on the beach below shout to some one who followed him, " It's over at the pier " ?

" Is anything the matter ? " She asked the question of a very old man, whom she knew well by sight, who was hurrying his best in the same direction. But his best was but little, as speed, though it did credit to his age ; for old Simon was said to be in his hundredth year. Rosalind walked easily beside him as he answered :

" I oondersta'and, missis, there's been a fall from the pier-head. . . . Oh yes, they've gotten un out ; ye may easy your mind o' that." But, for all that, Rosalind wasn't sorry her party were up at the hotel. She had believed them there long enough to have forgotten that she had no reason for the belief to speak of.

" You've no idea who it is ? "

" Some do say a lady and a gentleman." Rosalind felt still gladder of her confidence that Sally and Gerry were out of the way. " 'Ary one of 'em would be bound to drown but for the boats smart and handy—barring belike a swimmer like your young lady ! She's a rare one, to tell of ! "

" I believe she is. She swam round the Cat Buoy in a worse sea than this two days ago."

" And she would, too ! " Then the old boy's voice changed as he went on, garrulous : " But there be seas, missis, no man can swim in. My fower boys, they were fine swimmers—all fower ! "



"But were they ? . . ." Rosalind did not like to say drowned ; but old Simon took it as spoken.

"All fower of 'em—fine lads all—put off to the wreck—wreck o' th' brig Thyrsis, on th' Goodwins—and ne'er a one come back. And I had the telling of it to their mother. And the youngest, he never was found ; and the others was stone dead ashore, nigh on to the Foreland. There was none to help. Fifty-three year ago come this Michaelmas."

"Is their mother still living ?" Rosalind asked, interested. Old Simon had got to that stage in which the pain of the past is less than the pleasure of talking it over. "Died, she did," said he, almost as though he were unconcerned, "thirty-five year ago—five year afore ever I married my old missis yander." Rosalind felt less sympathy. If she were to lose Sally or Gerry, would she ever be able to talk like this, even if she lived to be ninety-nine ? Possibly yes—only she could not know it now. She felt too curious about what had happened at the pier to think of going back, and walked on with old Simon, not answering him much. He seemed quite content to talk.

She did not trouble herself on the point of her party returning and not finding her. Ten chances to one they would hear about the accident, and guess where she had gone. Most likely they would follow her. Besides, she meant to go back as soon as ever she knew what had happened.

Certainly there were a great many people down there round about Lloyd's Coffeehouse ! Had a life been lost ? How she hoped not ! What a sad end it would be to such a happy holiday as theirs had been ! She said something to this effect to the old man beside her. His reply was : "Ye may doubt of it, in my judgment, missis. The rowboats were not long enough ago for that. Mayhap he'll take a bit of nursing round, though." But he quickened his pace, and Rosalind was sorry that a sort of courtesy towards him stood in her way. She would have liked to go much quicker.

She could not quite understand the scared look of a girl to whom she said, "Is it a bad accident ? Do you know who it is ?" nor why this girl muttered something under her breath, then got away, nor why so many eyes, all tearful, should be fixed on *her*. She asked again of the woman nearest her, "Do you know who it is ?" but the woman gasped, and became hysterical, making her afraid she had accosted some anxious relative or near friend, who could not bear to speak of it. And

still all the eyes were fixed upon her. A shudder ran through her. Could that be pity she saw in them—pity for *her*?

“For God’s sake, tell me at once! Tell me what this is. . . .”

Still silence! She could hear through it sobs here and there in the crowd, and then two women pointed to where an elderly man who looked like a doctor came from a doorway close by. She heard the hysterical woman break down outright, and her removal by friends, and then the strong Scotch accent of the doctor-like man making a too transparent effort towards an encouraging tone.

“There’s nae reason to antecipate a fatal tairmination, so far. I wouldna undertake myself to say the seestolic motion of the heart was. . . .” But he hesitated, with a puzzled look, as Rosalind caught his arm and hung to it, crying out: “Why do you tell *me* this? For God’s sake, speak plain! I am stronger than you think.”

His answer came slowly, in an abated voice, but clearly: “Because they tauld me ye were the girl’s mither.”

In the short time that had passed since Rosalind’s mind first admitted an apprehension of evil the worst possibility it had conceived was that Vereker or her husband were in danger. No misgiving about Sally had entered it, except so far as a swift thought followed the fear of mishap to one of them. “How shall Sally be told of this? When and where will she know?”

Two of the women caught her as she fell, and carried her at the Scotch doctor’s bidding into a house adjoining, where Fenwick had been carried in a half-insensible collapse that had followed his landing from the cobble-boat in which he was sculled ashore.

“Tell me what has happened. Where is Dr. Vereker?” Rosalind asks the question of any of the fisherfolk round her as soon as returning consciousness brings speech. They look at each other, and the woman the cottage seems to belong to says interrogatively, “The young doctor-gentleman?” and then answers the last question. He is looking to the young lady in at the Coffeehouse. But no one says what has happened. Rosalind looks beseechingly round.

“Will you not tell me now? Oh, tell me—tell me the whole!”

“It’s such a little we know ourselves, ma’am. But my husband will be here directly. It was he brought the gentleman ashore. . . .”



"Where is the gentleman?" Rosalind has caught up the speaker with a decisive rally. Her natural strength is returning, prompted by something akin to desperation.

"We have him in here, ma'am. But he's bad, too! Here's my husband. Have ye the brandy, Tom?"

Rosalind struggles to her feet from the little settee they had laid her on. Her head is swimming, and she is sick, but she says: "Let me come!" She has gathered this much—that whatever has happened to Sally, Vereker is there beside her, and the other doctor she knows of. She can do nothing, and Gerry is close at hand. They let her come, and the woman and her husband follow. The one or two others go quietly out; there were too many for the tiny house.

That is Gerry, she can see, on the trestle-bedstead near the window with the flowerpots in it. He seems only half conscious, and his hands and face are cold. She cannot be sure that he has recognised her. Then she knows she is being spoken to. It is the fisherman's wife who speaks.

"We could find no way to get the gentleman's wet garments from him, but we might make a shift to try again. He's a bit hard to move. Not too much at once, Tom." Her husband is pouring brandy from his flask into a mug.

"Has he had any brandy?"

"Barely to speak of. Tell the lady, Tom!"

"No more than the leaving of a flask nigh empty out in my boat. It did him good, too. He got the speech to tell of the young lady, else—God help us!—we might have rowed him in, and lost the bit of water she was under. But we had the luck to find her." It was the owner of the cobble who spoke.

"Gerry, drink some of this at once. It's me—Rosey—your wife!" She is afraid his head may fail, for anything may happen now; but the brandy the fisherman's wife has handed to her revives him. No one speaks for awhile, and Rosalind, in the dazed state that so perversely notes and dwells on some small thing of no importance, and cannot grasp the great issue of some crisis we are living through, is keenly aware of the solemn ticking of a high grandfather clock, and of the name of the maker on its face—"Thomas Locock, Rochester." She sees it through the door into the front room, and wonders what the certificate or testimonial in a frame beside it is; and whether the Bible on the table below it, beside the fat blue jug with a ship and inscriptions on it, has illustrations and the Stem of Jesse rendered



pictorially. Or is it "Pilgrim's Progress," and no Bible at all? Who or what is she, that can sit and think of this and that, knowing that a world—her world and her husband's—is at stake, and that a terrible game is being played to save it, there within twenty yards of them? If she could only have given active help! But that she knows is impossible. She knows enough to be satisfied that all that can be done is being done; that even warmth and stimulants are useless, perhaps even injurious, till artificial respiration has done its work. She can recall Sally's voice telling her of these things. Yes, she is best here beside her husband.

What is that he says in a gasping whisper? Can anyone tell him what it is has happened? She cannot—perhaps could not if she knew—and she does not yet know herself. She repeats her question to the fisherman and his wife. They look at each other and say young Ben Tracy was on the pier. Call him in. It is something to know that what has happened was on the pier. While young Ben is hunted up the opportunity is taken to make the change of wet clothes for extemporised dry ones. The half-drowned, all-chilled, and bewildered man is reviving, and can help, though rigidly and with difficulty. Then Ben is brought in, appalled and breathless.

The red-eyed and tear-stained boy is in bad trim for giving evidence, but under exhortation to speak up and tell the lady he articulates his story through his sobs. He is young, and can cry. He goes back to the beginning.

His father told him to run and hunt round for the life-belt, and he went to left instead of to right, and missed of seeing it. And he was at the top o' the ladder, shooat'un aloud to his father, and the gentleman—he nodded towards Fenwick—was walking down below. Then the young lady came to the top stair of the ladder. The narrator threw all his powers of description into the simultaneousness of Sally's arrival at this point and the gentleman walking straight over the pier-edge. "And then the young lady she threw away her hat, and come runnin' down, runnin' down, and threw away her cloak, she *did*, and stra'at she went for t' wa'ater!" Young Benjamin's story and his control over his sobs come to an end at the same time, and his father, just arrived, takes up the tale.

"I saw there was mishap in it," he says, "by the manner of my young lad with the lady's hat, and I went direct for the life-belt, for I'm no swimmer myself. Tom, man, tell the lady I'm

no swimmer. . . .” Tom nodded assent, “. . . or I might have tried my luck. It was a bad business that the life-belt was well away at the far end, and I had no chance to handle it in time. It was the run of the tide took them out beyond the length of the line, and I was bound to make the best throw I could, and signal to shore for a boat.” He was going to tell how the only little boat at the pier-end had got water-logged in the night, when Rosalind interrupted him.

“Did you see them both in the water?”

“Plain. The young lady swimming behind and keeping the gentleman’s head above the water. I could hear her laughing like, and talking. Then I sent the belt out, nigh half-way, and she saw it and swam for it. Then I followed my young lad for to get out a shore-boat.”

It was the thought of the merpussy laughing like and talking in the cruel sea that was to engulf her that brought a heart-broken choking moan from her mother. Then, all being told, the fisher-folk glanced at each other, and by common consent went noiselessly from the room and lingered whispering outside. They closed the outer door, leaving the cottage entirely to Rosalind and her husband, and then they two were alone in the darkened world; and Conrad Vereker, whom they could not help, was striving—striving against despair—to bring back life to Sally.

A terrible strain—an almost killing strain—had been put upon Fenwick’s powers of endurance. Probably the sudden shock of his immersion, the abrupt suppression of an actual fever almost at the cost of sanity, had quite as much to do with this as what he was at first able to grasp of the extent of the disaster. But actual chill and exposure had contributed their share to the state of semi-collapse in which Rosalind found him. Had the rower of the cobble turned in-shore at once, some of this might have been saved; but that would have been one pair of eyes the fewer, and every boat was wanted. Now that his powerful constitution had the chance to reassert itself, his revival went quickly. He was awakening to a world with a black grief in it; but Rosey was there, and had to be lived for, and think of his debt to her! Think of the great wrong he did her in that old time that he had only regained the knowledge of yesterday! Her hand in his gave him strength to speak, and though his voice was weak it would reach the head that rested on his bosom.



"I can tell you now, darling, what I remember. I went off feverish in the night after you left me, and I suppose my brain gave way, in a sense. I went out early to shake it off, and a sort of delusion completely got the better of me. I fancied I was back at Bombay, going on the boat for Australia, and I just stepped off the pier-edge. Our darling must have been there. Oh, Sally, Sally! . . ." He had to pause and wait.

"Hope is not all dead—not yet, not yet!" Rosalind's voice seemed to plead against despair.

"I know, Rosey dearest—not yet. I heard her voice . . . oh, her voice! . . . call to me to be still, and she would save me. And then I felt her dear hand . . . first my arm, then my head, on each side." Again his voice was choking, but he recovered. "Then, somehow, the life-belt was round me—I can't tell how, but she made me hold it so as to be safe. She was talking and laughing, but I could not hear much. I know, however, that she said quite suddenly, 'I had better swim back to the pier. Hold on tight, Jeremiah!' . . . He faltered again before ending. "I don't know why she went, but she said, 'I must go,' and swam away."

That was all Fenwick could tell. The explanation came later. It was that unhappy petticoat-tape! A swimmer's leg-stroke may be encumbered in a calm sea, or when the only question is of keeping afloat for awhile. But in moderately rough water, and in a struggle against a running tide—which makes a certain speed imperative—the conditions are altered. Sally may have judged wrongly in trying to return to the pier, but remember—she could not in the first moments know that the mishap had been seen, and help was near at hand. Least of all could she estimate the difficulty of swimming in a loosened encumbered skirt. In our judgment, she would have done better to remain near the life-belt, even if she, too, had ultimately had to depend on it. The additional risk for Fenwick would have been small.

After he had ended what he had to tell he remained quite still, and scarcely spoke during the hour that followed. Twice or three times during that hour Rosalind rose to go out and ask if there was any change. But, turning to him with her hand on the door, and asking "Shall I go?" she was always met with "What good will it do? Conrad will tell us at once," and returned to her place beside him. After all, what she heard might be the end of Hope. Better stave off Despair to the last.

She watched the deliberate hands of the clock going cruelly



on, unfaltering, ready to register in cold blood the moment that should say that Sally, as they knew her, was no more. Thomas Locock, of Rochester, had taken care of that. Where would those hands be on that clock-face when all attempt at resuscitation had to stop ? And why live after it ?

She fancied she could hear, at intervals, Dr. Conrad's voice giving instructions ; and the voice of the Scotsman, less doubtfully, which always sounded like that of a medical man, for some reason not defined. As the clock-hand pointed to ten, she heard both quite near—outside Lloyd's Coffeehouse, evidently. Then she knew why she had so readily relinquished her purpose of getting at Dr. Conrad for news. It was the dread of seeing anything of the necessary manipulation of the body. Could she have helped, it would have been different. No, if she must look upon her darling dead, let it be later. But now there was that poor fellow-sufferer within reach, and she could see him without fear. She went out quickly.

“ Can you come away ? ”

“ Quite safely for a minute. The others have done it before.”

“ Is there a chance ? ”

“ There is a chance.” Dr. Conrad's hand as she grasps it is so cold that it makes her wonder at the warmth of her own. She is strangely alive to little things. “ Yes—there *is* a chance,” he repeats, more emphatically, as one who has been contradicted. But the old Scotch doctor had only said cautiously, “ It would be airy times to be geevin' up hopes,” in answer to a half-suggestion of reference to him in the words just spoken. Rosalind keeps the cold hand that has taken hers, and the crushing weight of her own misery almost gives place to her utter pity for the ash-white face before her, and the tale there is in it of a soul in torture.

“ What is the longest time . . . the longest time . . . ? ” she cannot frame her question, but both doctors take its meaning at once, repeating together or between them, “ The longest insensibility after immersion ? Many hours.”

“ But how many ? ” Six, certainly, is Dr. Conrad's testimony. But the Scotchman's conscience plagues him ; he must needs be truthful. “ Vara likely you're right,” he says. “ I couldna have borne testimony pairsonally to more than two. But vara sair-tainly you're more likely to be right than I.” His conscience has a chilling effect.

Fenwick, a haggard spectacle, has staggered to the door of

the cottage. He wants to get the attention of some one in the crowd that stands about in silence, never intrusively near. It is the father of young Benjamin, who comes, being summoned.

"That man you told me about . . ." Fenwick begins.

"Peter Burtenshaw?"

"Ah! How long was he insensible?"

"Eight hours—rather better! We got him aboard just before eight bells of the second dog-watch, and it was eight bells of the middle-watch afore he spoke. Safe and sure! Wasn't I on the morning-watch myself, and beside him four hours of the night before, and turned in at eight bells? He'll tell you the same tale himself. Peter Burtenshaw—he's a stevedore now, at the new docks at Southampton." Much of this was quite unintelligible—ship's time is always a problem—but it was reassuring, and Rosalind felt grateful to the speaker, whether what he said was true or not. In that curious frame of mind that observed the smallest things, she was just aware of the difficulty in the way of a reference to Peter Burtenshaw at the new docks at Southampton. Then she felt a qualm of added sickness at heart as she all but thought, "How that will amuse Sally when I come to tell it to her!"

The old Scotchman had to keep an appointment—connected with birth, not death. "I've geen my pledge to the wench's husband," he said, and went his way. Rosalind saw him stopped as he walked through the groups that were lingering silently for a chance of good news; and guessed that he had none to give, by the way his questioners fell back disappointed. She was conscious that the world was beginning to reel and swim about her; was half asking herself what could it all mean—the waiting crowds of fisher-folk speaking in undertones among themselves; the pitying eyes fixed on her and withdrawn as they met her own; the fixed pallor and tense speech of the man who held her hand, then left her to return again to an awful task that had, surely, something to do with her Sally, there in that cramped tarred-wood structure close down upon the beach. What did his words mean: "I must go back; it is best for you to keep away"? Oh, yes; now she knew, and it was all true. She saw how right he was, but she read in his eyes the reason why he was so strong to face the terror that she knew was *there*—in *there*! It was that he knew so well that death would be open to him if defeat was to be the end of the battle he was fighting. But there should be no panic. Not an inch of ground should be uncontested.



Back again in the little cottage with Gerry, but some one had helped her back. Surely, though, his voice had become his own again as he said: "We are no use, Rosey darling. We are best here. Conrad knows what he's about." And there was a rally of real hope, or a bold bid for it, when his old self spoke in his words: "Why does that solemn old fool of a Scotch doctor want to put such a bad face on the matter? Patience, sweetheart, patience!"

For them there was nothing else. They could hinder, but they could not help, outside there. Nothing for it now but to count the minutes as they passed, to feel the cruelty of that inexorable clock in the stillness; for the minutes passed too quickly. How could it be else, when each one of them might have heralded a hope and did not; when each bequeathed its little legacy of despair? But was there need that each new clock-tick as it came should say, as the last had said: "Another second has gone of the little hour that is left; another inch of the space that parts us from the sentence that knows no respite or reprieve"? Was it not enough that the end must come, without the throb of that monotonous reminder: "Nearer still!—nearer still!"

Neither spoke but a bare word or two, till the eleventh stroke of the clock, at the hour, left it resonant and angry, and St. Sennans tower answered from without. Then Rosalind said, "Shall I go out and see, now?" and Fenwick replied, "Do, darling, if you wish to. But he would tell us at once, if there were anything." She answered, "Yes, perhaps it's no use," and fell back into silence.

She was conscious that the crowd outside had increased, in spite of a fine rain that had followed the overclouding of the morning. She could hear the voices of other than the fisher-folk—some she recognised as those of beach acquaintance. That was Mrs. Arkwright, the mother of Gwenny. And that was Gwenny herself, crying bitterly. Rosalind knew quite well, though she could hear no words, that Gwenny was being told that she could not go to Miss Nightingale now. She half thought she would like to have Gwenny in, to cry on her and make her perhaps feel less like a granite-block in pain. But, then, was not Sally a baby of three once? She could remember the pleasure the dear old Major had at seeing baby in her bath, and how he squeezed a sponge over her head, and she screwed her eyes up. He had died in good time, and escaped this inheritance of sorrow. How could she have told him of it?



What was she that had outlived him to bear all this ? Much, so much, of her was two dry, burning eyes, each in a ring of pain, that had forgotten tears and what they meant. How was it that now, when that Arkwright woman's voice brought back her talk upon the beach, not four-and-twenty hours since, and her unwelcome stirring of the dead embers of a burned-out past—how was it that that past, at its worst, seemed easier to bear than this intolerable *now* ? How had it come about that a memory of twenty years ago, a memory of how she had prayed that her unborn baby might die, rather than live to remind her of that black stain upon the daylight, its father, had become in the end worse to her, in her heart of hearts, than the thing that caused it. And then she fell to wondering when it was that her child first took hold upon her life ; first crept into it, then slowly filled it up. She went back on little incidents of that early time, asking herself, was it then, or then, I first saw that she was Sally ? She could recall, without adding another pang to her dull, insensate suffering, the moment when the baby, as the Major and General Pellew sat playing chess upon the deck, captured the white king, and sent him flying into the Mediterranean ; and though she could not smile now, could know how she would have smiled another time. Was that white king afloat upon the water still ? A score of little memories of a like sort chased one another as her mind ran on, all through the childhood and girlhood of their subject. And now—it was all to end. . . .

And throughout those years this silent man beside her, this man she meant to live for still, for all it should be in a darkened world—this man was . . . where ? To think of it—in all those years, no Sally for him ! See what she had become to him in so short a time—such a little hour of life ! Think of the waste of it—of what she might have been ! And it was she, the little unconscious thing herself, that sprang from what had parted them. If she had to face all the horrors of her life anew for it, would she flinch from one of them, only to hear that the heart that had stopped its beating would beat again, that the voice that was still would sound in her ears once more.

Another hour ! The clock gave out its warning that it meant to strike, in deadly earnest with its long premonitory roll. Then all those twelve strokes so quick upon the heels of those that sounded but now, as it seemed. Another hour from the tale of those still left for reasonable hope ; another hour nearer to

despair. The reverberations died away, and left the cold insensate tick to measure out the next one, while St. Sennans tower gave its answer as before.

“ Shall I go now, Gerry, to see ? ”

“ I say not, darling ; but go, if you like.” He could not bear to hear it, if it was to be the death-sentence. So Rosalind still sat on to the ticking of the clock.

Her brain and powers of thought were getting numbed. Trivial things came out of the bygone times, and drew her into dreams—back into the past again—to give a moment’s spurious peace ; then forsook her treacherously to an awakening, each time deadlier than the last. Each time to ask anew, what could it all mean ? Sally dead or dying—Sally dead or dying ! Each time she repeated the awful words to herself, to try to get a hold she was not sure she had upon their meaning. Each time she slipped again into a new dream and lost it.

Back again now, in the old days of her girlhood ! Back in that little front garden of her mother’s house, twenty odd years ago, and Gerry’s hand in hers—the hand she held to now ; and Gerry’s face that now, beside her, looked so still and white and heart-broken, all aglow with life and thoughtless youth and hope. Again she felt upon her lips his farewell kiss, not to be renewed until . . . but at the thought she shuddered away, horror-stricken, from the nightmare that any memory must be of what then crossed her life, and robbed them both of happiness. And then her powers of reason simply reeled and swam, and her brain throbbed as she caught the thought forming in it : “ Better happiness so lost, and all the misery over again, than this blow that has come upon us now ! Sally dead or dying—Sally dead or dying ! ” For what was *she*, the thing we could not bear to lose, but the living record, the very outcome, of the poisoned soil in that field of her life her memory shrank from treading ?

What was that old Scotchman—he seemed to have come back—what was he saying outside there ? Yes, listen ! Fenwick starts up, all his life roused into his face. If only that clock would end that long unnecessary roll of warning, and strike ! But before the long-deferred single stroke comes to say another hour has passed, he is up and at the door, with Rosalind clinging to him terrified.

“ What’s the news, doctor ? Tell it out, man !—never fear.” Rosalind dares not ask ; her heart gives a great bound, and stops,

and her teeth chatter and close tight. She could not speak if she tried.

“ I wouldna like to be over-confeedent, Mr. Fenwick, and ye’ll understand I’m only geevin’ ye my own eempression. . . . ”

“ Yes, quite right—go on. . . . ”

“ Vara parteecularly because our young friend Dr. Vereker is unwulling to commeet himself . . . but I should say a pairceptible. . . . ”

He is interrupted. For with a loud shout Dr. Conrad himself, dishevelled and ashy-white of face, comes running from the door opposite. The word he has shouted so loudly he repeats twice ; then turns as though to go back. But he does not reach the door, for he staggers suddenly, like a man struck by a bullet, and falls heavily, insensible.

There is a movement and a shouting among the scattered groups that have been waiting, three hours past, as those nearest at hand run to help and raise him ; and the sound of voices and exultation passes from group to group. For what he shouted was the one word “ Breath ! ” And Rosalind knew its meaning as her head swam and she heard no more.



## CHAPTER XLVII

PROFESSOR SALES WILSON, Mrs. Julius Bradshaw's papa, was enjoying himself thoroughly. He was the sole occupant of 260, Ladbroke Grove Road, servants apart. All his blood-connected household had departed two days after the musical evening described in Chapter XL., and there was nothing that pleased him better than to have London to himself—that is to say, to himself and five millions of perfect strangers. He had it now, and could wallow unmolested in Sabellian researches, and tear the flimsy theories of Bopsius—whose name we haven't got quite right—to tatters. Indeed, we are not really sure the researches *were* Sabellian. But no matter!

Just at the moment at which we find him, the Professor was not engaged in any researches at all, unless running one's eye down the columns of a leading journal, to make sure there is nothing in them, is a research. That is what he was doing in his library. And he was also talking to himself—a person from whom he had no reserves or concealments. What he had to say ran in this wise :

“H'm!—h'm!—‘The Cyclopean Cyclopædia.’ Forty volumes in calf. Net price thirty-five pounds. A digest of human knowledge, past, present, and probable. With a brief appendix enumerating the things of which we are still ignorant, and of our future ignorance of which we are scientifically certain . . . h'm! h'm! . . . not dear at the price. But stop a bit! ‘Until twelve o'clock on Saturday next copies of the above, with revolving bookcase, can be secured for the low price of seven pounds ten.’ . . .” This did not seem to increase the speaker's confidence, and he continued, as he wrestled with a rearrangement of the sheet: “Shiny paper, and every volume weighs a ton. Very full of matter—everything in it except the thing you want to know. By-the-bye . . . what a singular thing it is, when you come to think of it, that so many people will sell you a thing

worth a pound for sixpence, who won't give you a shilling outright on any terms ! It must have to do with their unwillingness to encourage mendicancy. A noble self-denial, prompted by charity organisations ! Hullo !—what's this ? ' Heroic rescue from drowning at St. Sennans-on-Sea.' H'm—h'm—h'm !—can't read all that. But *that's* where the married couple went—St. Sennans-on-Sea. The bride announced her intention yesterday of looking in at five to-day for tea. So I suppose I shall be disturbed shortly."

The soliloquist thought it necessary to repeat his last words twice, to convince herself and the atmosphere that his position was one of grievance. Having done this, and feeling he ought to substantiate his suggestion that he was just on the point of putting salt on the tail of an unidentified Samnite, or a finishing touch on the demolition of Bopsius, he folded his newspaper, which we suspect he had not been reading candidly from, and resumed his writing.

Did you ever have a quarter of an hour of absolutely unalloyed happiness ? Probably not, if you have never known the joys of profound antiquarian erudition, with an unelucidated past behind you, and inexpensive publication before. The Professor's fifteen minutes that followed were not only without alloy, but had this additional zest—that that girl would come bothering in directly, and he would get his grievance, and work it. And at no serious expense, for he was really very partial to his daughter, and meant, *au fond de soi*, to enjoy her visit. Nevertheless, discipline had to be maintained, if only for purposes of self-deception, and the Professor really believed in his own "Humph ! I supposed it would be that," when Lætitia's knock came at the street door.

"Such a shame to disturb you, papa dear ! But you'll have to give me tea—you said you would."

"It isn't five o'clock yet. Well—never mind. Sit down and don't fidget. I shall have done presently. . . . No ! make yourself useful now you *are* here. Get me 'Passeri Picturæ Etruscorum,' volume three, out of shelf C near the window . . . that's right. Very good find for a young married woman. Now sit down and read the paper—there's something will interest you. You may ring for tea, only don't talk."

The Professor then became demonstratively absorbed in the Sabellians, or Bopsius, or both, and Lætitia acted as instructed, but without coming on the newspaper-paragraph. She couldn't

ask for a clue after so broad a hint, so she had to be contented with supposing her father referred to the return of Sir Charles Penderfield, Bart., as a Home Rule Unionist and Protectionist Free Trader. Only if it was that, it was the first she had ever known of her father being aware of the Bart.'s admiration for herself. So she made the tea, and waited till the pen-scratching stopped, and the Sabellians or Bopsius were blotted, glanced through and ratified.

"There, that'll do for that, I suppose." His tone surrendered the grievance as an act of liberality, but maintained the principle. "Well, have we found it?"

"Found what?"

"The heroic rescue—at your place—Saint Somebody—Saint Senanus. . . ."

"No! Do show me that." Lætitia forms a mental image of a lifeboat going out to a wreck. How excited Sally must have been!

"Here, give it me and I'll find it. . . . Yes—that's right—a big lump and a little lump. I'm to take less sugar because of gout. Very good! Oh . . . yes . . . here we are. 'Heroic rescue at St. Sennans' . . . just under 'Startling elopement at Clapham Rise' . . . Got it?"

Lætitia supplied the cup of tea, poured one for herself, and took the paper from her father without the slightest suspicion of what was coming. "It will have to wait a minute till I've had some tea," she said. "I'm as thirsty as I can be. I've been to see my mother-in-law and Constance"—this was Julius's sister—"off to Southend. And just fancy, papa; Pag and I played from nine till a quarter-to-one last night, and he never felt it, nor had any headache nor anything." The topic is so interesting that the unread paragraph has to wait.

The Professor cannot think of any form of perversion better than "Very discreditable to him. I hope you blew him well up?"

"Now, papa, don't be nonsensical! Do you know, I'm really beginning to believe Pag's right, and it *was* the little galvanic battery. Shouldn't you say so, though, seriously?"

"Why, yes. If there wasn't a big galvanic battery, it must have been the little one. It stands to reason. But *what* does my musical son-in-law think was the little galvanic battery?"

"Oh dear, papa, how ridiculous you are! Why, of course, his nerves going away—as they really *have* done, you know;



and I can't see any good pretending they haven't. Yesterday was the fourth evening he hasn't felt them. . . ."

"Stop a bit! There is a lack of scientific precision in the structure of your sentences. A young married woman ought really to be more accurate. Now let's look it over, and do a little considering. I gather, in the first place, that my son-in-law's nerves going away was, or were, a little galvanic battery. . . ."

"Dear papa, don't paradox and catch me out. Just this once, be reasonable! Think what a glorious thing it would be for us if his nerves *had* gone for good. Another cup? Was the last one right?"

"My position is peculiar. (Yes, the tea was all right.) I find myself requested to be reasonable, and to embark on a career of reasonableness by considering the substantial advantages to my daughter and her husband of the disappearance of his nervous system. . . ."

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't! *Do* be serious. . . ." The Professor looked at her reflectively as he drank the cup of tea, and it seemed to dawn on him slowly that his daughter *was* serious. The fact is, Tishy was very serious indeed, and was longing for sympathy over a matter for great elation. She and Julius had been purposely playing continuously for long hours to test the apparent suspension or cessation of his nervous affection, and had not so far seen a sign of a return; but they were dreadfully afraid of counting their chickens in advance.

"I noticed the other evening"—the Professor has surrendered, and become serious—"that Julius wasn't any the worse, and he had played a long time. What should you do?" Tishy looked inquiringly. "Well, I mean what steps could be taken if it were. . . .?"

"If we could trust to it? Oh, no difficulty at all! Any number of engagements directly."

"It would please your mother." Tishy cannot help a passing thought on the oddity of her parents' relations to one another. Even though he spoke of the Dragon as a connexion of his daughter he was but little concerned with, the first thought that crossed his mind was a sort of satisfaction under protest that she would have something to be pleased about. Tishy wondered whether she and Julius would end up like that. Of course they wouldn't! What a pity people's parents were so unreasonable!

"Yes; mamma wouldn't be at all sorry. Fiddlers are not

Baronets, but anything is better than haberdashing. *I'm* not ashamed of it, you know." She had subjected herself gratuitously to her own suspicion that she might be, and resented it.

Her father looked at her with an amused face ; looked down at these social fads of poor humanity from the height of his Olympus. If he knew anything about the Unionist Home Ruler's aspirations for Lætitia, he said nothing. Then he asked a natural question—what *was* the little galvanic battery ? Tishy gave her account of it, but before she had done the Professor was thinking about Sabines or Lucanians. The fact is that Tishy was never at her best with her father. She was always so anxious to please him that she tumbled over her own anxiety, and in this present case didn't tell her story as well as she might have done. He began considering how he could get back to the shreds of Bopsius, if any were left, and looked at his watch.

" Well, that was very funny—very funny !" said he absently. " Now, don't forget the heroic rescue before you go."

Tishy perceived the delicate hint, and picked up the paper with " I declare I was forgetting all about it !" But she had scarcely cast her eyes on it when she gave a cry. " Oh, papa, papa ; it's *Sally* ! Oh dear !" And then : " Oh dear, oh dear ! I can hardly see to make it out. But I'm sure she's all right ! They say so." And kept on trying to read. Her father did what was, under the circumstances, the best thing to do—took the paper from her, and as she sank back with a beating heart and flushed face on the chair she had just risen from read the paragraph to her as follows :

" HEROIC RESCUE FROM DROWNING AT ST. SENNANS-ON-SEA. —Early this morning, as Mr. Algernon Fenwick, of Shepherd's Bush, at present on a visit at the old town, was walking on the pier-end, at the point where there is no rail or rope for the security of the public, his foot slipped, and he was precipitated into the sea, a height of at least ten feet. Not being a swimmer, his life was for some minutes in the greatest danger ; but fortunately for him his stepdaughter, Miss Rosalind Nightingale, whose daring and brilliant feats in swimming have been for some weeks past the admiration and envy of all the visitors to the bathing quarter of this most attractive of south-coast watering-places, was close at hand, and without a moment's hesitation plunged in to his rescue. Encumbered as she was by clothing, she was nevertheless able to keep Mr. Fenwick above water, and ultimately to reach a life-buoy that was thrown from the pier.



Unfortunately, having established Mr. Fenwick in a position of safety, she thought her best course would be to return to the pier. She was unable in the end to reach it, and her strength giving way, she was picked up, after an immersion of more than twenty minutes, by the boats that put off from the shore. It will readily be imagined that a scene of great excitement ensued, and that a period of most painful anxiety followed, for it was not till nearly four hours afterwards that, thanks to the skill and assiduity of Dr. Fergus Maccoll, of 22A, Albion Crescent, assisted by Dr. Vereker, of London, the young lady showed signs of life. We are happy to say that the latest bulletins appear to point to a speedy and complete recovery, with no worse consequences than a bad fright. We understand that the expediency of placing a proper railing at all dangerous points on the pier is being made the subject of a numerous signed petition to the Town Council."

"That seems all right," said the Professor. And he said nothing further, but remained rubbing his shaved surface in a sort of compromising way—a way that invited or permitted exception to be taken to his remark.

"All right? Yes, but—oh, papa, do think what might have happened! They might both have been drowned."

"But they weren't!"

"Of course they weren't! But they *might* have been."

"Well, it would have proved that people are best away from the seaside. Not that any further proof is necessary. Now, good-bye, my dear; I must get back to my work."

That afternoon Julius Bradshaw went on a business mission to Cornhill, and was detained in the City till past five o'clock. It was then too late to return to the office, as six was the closing hour; so he decided on the Twopenny Tube to Lancaster Gate, the nearest point to home. There was a great shouting of evening papers round the opening into the bowels of the earth at the corner of the Bank, and Julius's attention was caught by an unearthly boy with a strange accent.

"'Mail and Echo,' third edition, all the latest news for a 'apeny. Fullest partic'lars in my copies. Alderman froze to death on the Halps. Shocking neglect of twins. 'Oxton man biles his third wife alive. Cricket this day—Surrey going strong. More about heroic rescue from drowning at St. Senna's. Full and ack'rate partic'lars in my copies only. Catch hold! . . ." Julius



caught hold, and thought the boy amusing. Conversation followed, during cash settlements.

“Who’s been heroically rescued?”

“Friend of mine—young lady—fished her governor out—got drowned over it herself, and was brought to. ‘Mail’ a ‘apeny; torkin’ a penny extra! Another ‘apeny.’” Julius acquiesced, but felt entitled to more talking.

“Where was it?”

“St. Senna’s, where they make the lectury—black stuff.... Yes, it *was* a friend o’ mine, mister, so I tell you, and no lies! Miss Rosalind Nightingale. I see her in the fog round Piccadilly way.... No, no lies at all! Told me her name of her own accord, and went indoors.” Julius would have tried to get to the bottom of this if he had not been so taken aback by it, even at the cost of more pence for conversation; but by the time he had found that his informant had certainly read the paragraph, or at least mastered Sally’s name right, the boy had vanished. Of course, he was the boy with the gap in his teeth that she had seen in the fog when Colonel Lund was dying. We can only hope that his shrewdness and prudence in worldly matters have since brought him the success they deserve, as his disappearance was final.

Even the Twopenny Tube was too slow for Julius Bradshaw, so mad was he with impatience to get to Georgiana Terrace. When he got there, and went upstairs two steps at a time, and “I say, Tishy dearest, look at *this*!” on his lips, he was met half-way by his young wife, also extending a newspaper, and “Paggy, just *fancy* what’s happened! Look at *this*!”

They were so wild with excitement that they refused food—at least, when it took the form of second helpings—and when the banquet was over Lætitia could do nothing but walk continually about the room with gleaming eyes and a flushed face waiting furiously for the post; for she was sure it would bring her a letter from Sally or her mother. And she was right, for the rush to the street door that followed the postman’s knock resulted firstly in denunciations of an intransitive letter-box nobody but a fool would ever have tried to stuff all those into, and secondly in a pounce by Lætitia on Sally’s own handwriting.

“You may just as well read it upstairs comfortably, Tish,” says Julius, meanly affecting stoicism now that it is perfectly clear—for the arrival of the letter practically shows it—that nobody is incapacitated by the accident. “Come along up!”

“ All right ! ” says his wife. “ Why, mine’s written in pencil ! Who’s yours from ? ”

“ I haven’t opened it yet. Come along. Don’t be a goose ! ” This was a little cheap stoicism, worth deferring satisfaction of curiosity three minutes for.

“ Whose handwriting is it ? ” She goes on devouring, intensely absorbed, though she speaks.

“ It looks like the doctor’s.”

“ Of course ! You’ll see directly. . . . All right, I’m coming ! ”

Take your last look at the Julius Bradshaws, as they settle down with animated faces to serious perusal of their letters. They may just as well drink their coffee, though, and Julius will presently light his cigar for anything we know to the contrary ; but we shall not see it, for when we have transcribed the two letters they are reading we shall lay down our pen, and then, if you want to know any more about the people in this story, you must inquire of the originals, all of whom are still living except Dr. Vereker’s mother, who died last year, we believe.

Here are the letters :

“ MY DEAREST TISHY,

“ I have a piece of news to tell that will be a great surprise to you. I am engaged to Conrad Vereker. Perhaps, though, I oughtn’t to say as much as that, because it hasn’t gone any farther at present than me promising not to marry anyone else, and as far as I can see I might have promised any man that.

“ Now, don’t write and say you expected it all along, because I shan’t believe you.

“ Of course, tell anybody you like—only I hope they’ll all say that’s no concern of theirs. I should be so much obliged to them. Besides, so very little has transpired to go by that I can’t see exactly what they could either congratulate or twit about. Being engaged is so very shadowy. Do you remember our dancing-mistress at school, who had been engaged seven years to a dancing-master, and then they broke it off by mutual consent, and she married a Creole ? And they’d saved up enough for a school of their own all the time ! However, as long as it’s distinctly understood there’s to be no marrying at present, I don’t think the arrangement a bad one. Of course, you’ll understand I mean other girls, and the sort of men they get engaged to. With Prosy it’s different ; one knows where one is. Only



I shouldn't consider it honourable to jilt Prosy, even for the sake of remaining single. You see what I mean.

"The reason of pencil (don't be alarmed !) is that I am writing this in bed, having been too long in the water. It's to please Prosy, because my System has had a shake. I *am* feeling very queer still, and can't control my thumb to write. I must tell you about it, or you'll get the story somewhere else and be frightened.

"It was all Jeremiah's fault, and I really can't think what he was doing. He admits that he was seedy, and had had a bad night. Anyhow, it was like this: I followed him down to the pier very early before breakfast, and you remember where the man was fishing and caught nothing that day? Well, what does Jeremiah do but just walk plump over the edge. I had all but got to him, by good luck, and of course I went straight for him and caught him before he sank. I induced him not to kick and flounder, and got him inside a life-belt they threw from the pier, and then I settled to leave him alone and swim to the steps, because you've no idea how I felt my clothes, and it would have been all right, only a horrible heavy petticoat got loose and demoralised me. I don't know how it happened, but I got all wrong somehow, and a breaker caught me. *Don't get drowned*, Tishy; or, if you do, *don't be revived again!* I don't know which is worst, but I think reviving. I can't write about it. I'll tell you when I come back.

"They won't tell me how long I was coming to, but it must have been much longer than I thought, when one comes to think of it. Only I can't tell, because when poor dear Prosy had got me to\*—down at Lloyd's Coffee-house, where old Simon sits all day—and I had been wrapped up in what I heard a Scotchman call 'weel-warmed blawnkets,' and brought home in a closed fly from Padlock's livery stables, I went off sound asleep with my fingers and toes tingling, and never knew the time nor anything. (Continuation bit.) This is being written, to tell you the truth, in the small hours of the morning, in secrecy with a guttering candle. It seems to have been really quite a terrible alarm to poor darling mother and Jeremiah, and much about the same to my medical adviser, who resuscitated me on Marshall Hall's system, followed by Silvester's, and finally opened a vein. And there was I alive all the time, and not grateful to Prosy at all, I can tell you, for bringing me to. I have requested not to be

\* Part of a verb to *get to*, or *bring to*. Not very intelligible!



brought to next time. The oddity of it all was indescribable. And there, now I come to think of it, I've never so much as seen the Octopus since Prosy and I got engaged. I shall have to go round as soon as I'm up. (Later continuation bit—after breakfast.) Do you know, it makes me quite miserable to think what an anxiety I've been to all of them! Mother and J. can't take their eyes off me, and look quite wasted and resigned. And poor dear Prosy! How ever shall I make it up to him? Do you know, as soon as it was known I was to,\* the dear fellow actually tumbled down insensible! I had no idea of the turn-out there's been until just now, when mother and Jeremiah confessed up. Just fancy it! Now I must shut up to catch the post.

“Your ever affect. friend,

“SALLY.”

“MY DEAR BRADSHAW,

“I am so very much afraid you and your wife may be alarmed by hearing of the events of this morning—possibly by a press-paragraph, for these things get about—that I think it best to send you a line to say that, though we have all had a terrible time of anxiety, no further disastrous consequences need be anticipated. Briefly, the affair may be stated thus:

“Fenwick and Miss Nightingale were on the pier early this morning, and from some unexplained false step F. fell from the lower stage into the water. Miss N. immediately plunged in to his rescue, and brought him in safety to a life-buoy that was thrown from the pier. It seems that she then started to swim back, being satisfied of his safety till other help came, but got entangled with her clothes and went under. She was brought ashore insensible, and remained so nearly four hours. For a long time I was almost without hope, but we persevered against every discouragement, with complete final success. I am a good deal more afraid now of the effect of the shock on Mrs. Fenwick and her husband than for anything that may happen to Miss N., whose buoyancy of constitution is most remarkable. You will guess that I had rather a rough time (the news came rather suddenly to me), and all the more (but I know you will be glad to hear this) that Miss N. and your humble servant had only just entered on an engagement to be married at some date hereafter not specified. I am ashamed to say I showed weakness (but not till I was sure the lungs were acting naturally),

\* See note, p. 526.

and had to be revived with stimulants ! I am all right now, and, do you know, I really believe my mother will be all the better for it ; for when she heard what had happened, she actually got up and *ran*—yes, ran—to Lloyd's Coffee-house (you remember it ?), where I was just coming round, and had the satisfaction of telling her the news. I cannot help suspecting that her case may have been wrongly diagnosed, and that the splanchnic ganglion and solar plexus are really the seat of the evil. If so, the treatment has been entirely at fault.

“ I shall most likely be back to-morrow, so keep your congrats. for me, old chap. No time for a letter. Love from us all to yourself and Mrs. J. B.

“ Yours ever,

“ CONRAD VEREKER.

“ P.S.—I reopen this (which I wrote late last night) to say that Miss N., so far from having acquired a horror of the water (as is usual in such cases), talks of ‘ swimming over the ground ’ if the weather clears. I fear she is incorrigible.”

THE END

SOME ENGLISH AND AMERICAN  
OPINIONS OF

JOSEPH VANCE AND  
ALICE-FOR-SHORT

BY WILLIAM DE MORGAN



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"Mr. De Morgan has written a remarkable novel—a fine novel, by whatever standards we judge it. Its primary merit is that it gives a true and complete picture of certain forms of life. We have never for a moment a doubt about the reality of the story he tells. Every character, down to the humblest, has the stamp of a genuine humanity."

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## THE SUPREMACY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL.

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# THE SUPREMACY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL.

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